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ABSTRACT

A study described and evaluated the Cooperative Communication Project, which was designed to improve communication between inner-city families and schools about young children's literacy development. A total of four pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers from two schools in the Baltimore City Public Schools completed an inservice course (a series of six seminar-format discussion sessions) out of which developed plans for individual action research projects to be carried out in the teachers' classrooms. Frequent on-site support visits were conducted while the teachers were implementing their research projects. Teachers presented oral reports and prepared a final written version of their project reports. Because of the small number of teachers and schools that eventually participated in the project, preliminary plans to investigate systematically the impact of the inservice course on the organizational climate of the schools and the relation of the schools with their communities were dropped. Evaluation of the four completed projects is cautiously optimistic on the grounds that the process succeeded in connecting research findings and issues with the lived experience of the participating teachers and in inspiring them to undertake independent inquiry projects in the specified fields of cooperative communication among parents and teachers about children's emergent literacy. (Contains 43 references, the four final written projects, and five figures representing material presented in seminars and excerpts of transcripts of seminar discussions. An appendix contains a list of the concrete products associated with each of the four projects. (RS)

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Cooperative Communication Among Parents and Teachers About Children's Emergent Literacy

by

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Final Project Report to the National Reading Research Center
Universities of Georgia and Maryland

1996

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1. Goals of the Cooperative Communication Project

The responsibility for educating children of preschool age is generally understood as primarily vested in their families. Yet the scale of provision of preschooling has greatly expanded during the second half of the twentieth century, to the point where it has become the norm for public school systems in many countries to encourage, if not require, parents to enrol their child in some form of preschool program for at least one year before entry into the first grade (cf. Lamb, Sternberg, Hwang & Broberg, 1992; Woodhead, 1996). The project described in this report was designed to contribute to the professional preparation of teachers for their roles in this form of public intervention into the structuring of early child development, with special attention to the cultivation and support of young children's emergent literacy, and to the complementary resources and responsibilities of children's homes and their schools.

Children develop along multiple strands and across multiple contexts. Their gradual appropriation of the cultural resources of literacy depends on a series of interactions with parents, teachers, and peers, whose mutual understanding has come to appear increasingly problematic within the ecological setting known as the American inner-city (Thompson, Mixon & Serpell, 1996).The long-term goal of this project is to improve communication between families and schools in this setting about young children's development. A group of preschool teachers employed by the public school system of the large eastern seaboard, American city of Baltimore came together with a group of university-based developmental psychologists to explore what teachers can discover in the course of their professional work about emergent literacy and the relations between children's homes and schools.

The project was conceived as a contribution towards two of the stated goals of the National reading Research Center, by which it was sponsored:

> . "systematization of multiple ways in which school curricula can be designed to connect productively with the culture of children's homes, enriching and extending it rather than stigmatizing it as deficient or ignoring it as unintelligible" (NRRC Year 3 proposal, p.59), and
> . identifying "plausible and feasible strategies for teachers to connect their pedagogy effectively with the home lives of their students" (NRRC Year 3 proposal, p.60)

The first three authors of this report are co-principal investigators of a longitudinal study of the emergence of literacy in sociocultural context initiated in 1992 (the Early Childhood Project). The study sample is composed of children enrolled in preschools and elementary schools across a variety of socioculturally contrastive neighborhoods in the city of Baltimore. Our decision to embark on the Cooperative Communication Project was motivated by a concern that our ongoing research should feed back into the

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community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1992) of public education in such a way as to contribute tangibly to the enhancement of children's developmental opportunities. As university teachers, in addition to the activity of scientific investigation, we are involved in curriculum development, instruction and mentorship within a graduate studies program in *Applied Developmental Psychology*. This emergent field of specialization (cf. Fisher & Koocher, 1990; Fisher, Murray & Dill, 1993; Lerner & Miller, 1993; UMBGSB, 1994) aspires to prepare students to contribute to the design of public policy and professional practice pertaining to the development of children, in ways that transcend the traditional job descriptions of school psychologist, clinical child psychologist, counsellor, etc. The other two authors are both graduate students enrolled in the same program, who have concurrently served as research assistants on the Early Childhood Project. Consulting with a group of teachers based in the inner-city schools of our research project afforded us an opportunity to test the practical applicability of the concepts being used to interpret the study's findings scientifically. This interface between science and practice has often proven to be a difficult one to negotiate (Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 1992), despite the face validity of Lewin's famous dictum that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (McGuire, 1973, p.447).

The strategy adopted for this exploratory investigation was termed *action-research* or *teacher-inquiry*. The rationale of this approach was that it would define an effective route to the formulation of "understandings that make sense to classroom teachers and thus affect educational practices in the near future", another of the stated objectives of the National Reading Research Center (NRRC, 1993, p.1). Although teachers are exposed to developmental theory as part of their basic training, it is commonly stated by members of the profession that their day-to-day professional interactions with children are guided more by common sense and personal intuition than by explicit principles derived from formally stated theory (e.g. Shavelson & Stern, 1981). The implicit cultural models or "ethnotheories" that inform the practices of preschool teachers may or may not be consistent with various principles of developmental psychology (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Delpit, 1988). Unless a strong conceptual bridge is built between these two types of understanding, it appears likely that theoretical accounts of child development and education will remain a rhetorical back drop to actual practice with little value as a resource for the analysis of real-world problems and the formulation of strategies for addressing them. By involving teachers in the active co-construction of ideas to guide their inquiries within the context of their own professional niches we hoped to bridge for them the "nagging gap between the `official knowledge' (Apple, 1993) of research and the constructed reality of much practice" (NRRC, 1993, p.258).

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More generally, the project seeks to study "ways of knowing through collaboration ... and listening to diverse voices" (NRRC, 1993, p.260), and to learn "more about how literacy professionals acquire the knowledge that leads to changes in their literacy practices" (NRRC 1993, p.261).

2. The Early Childhood Project: philosophy, theory, methodology.

The Early Childhood Project was conceived as an attempt to build a research base for informed social intervention. In our earliest formulation of the proposed research we wrote:

> "Our principal goal in this project is to generate a focused account of the developmental transition from preschool childhood through the early stages of elementary schooling in a large city for children from a variety of different types of home background. As the research progresses we plan to put this account to work as a resource for the enhancement of cooperation between parents and teachers for the benefit of the children's education" (Serpell, Baker & Sonnenschein, 1991, p.1).

The theoretical perspective of the study adopts a contextual view of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cole, 1992; LCHC, 1983; Serpell, 1993). Young children experience a variety of different contexts, each of which provides distinctive opportunities, challenges and supports for their development. One of the goals of our research project is to provide a detailed and accurate description of two important types of context between which most young children in America start commuting on a daily basis from the age of 4 or 5 onwards: the home context and the school context. Each of these types of context is made up of a complex system of activities that occur again and again. Each recurrent activity has a meaning for the people who participate in it. The process of development in early childhood involves a gradual discovery by the child of those cultural meanings.

In the period from the winter of 1992-3 to the Spring of 1994, the project recruited a total of 42 families, each of them with a four-year old child enrolled in pre-K, moving on into Kindergarten in 1993-94. The families were distributed across six neighborhoods in Baltimore City, each of which is served by a different public elementary school. In some of these neighborhoods the population is predominantly

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black (or African-American), in some it is predominantly white (or Euro-American), and in some there is a mixture of both ethnic groups.[1]

Our research examines three different aspects of the contexts of home and school: the recurrent activities that feature in each context, the meanings of those activities, and the ways in which those who participate in them interact with one another. We plan to explore the relationship between these details of context and the child's emerging competence over time: the understanding, skills, and dispositions that define what it means to become literate.

For the home context, we have asked the primary caregiver of each child to describe for us in detail the various activities in which the child participates, and to explain to us the meanings of those activities from her or his perspective as a caregiver (in other words as a parent, or a grandparent, etc.), as well as discussing with us what they may mean to the young child. Each family has been visited by one or more members of our research team several times over the past year. On the first visit we requested the primary caregiver to keep a `diary' of their child's everyday activities at various times of day throughout one week (either in writing or by dictating to a tape-recorder). On later visits, we used a series of questions to guide the caregiver in expanding the preliminary account sketched in the diary into a more comprehensive "inventory" of the child's home environment (Sonnenschein, Baker & Serpell, 1995). At the same time we prompted her to share with us her "implicit theories" about child development and about ways in which parents, playmates, schooling and other factors can influence the course of a child's development. We have also observed the child interacting with members of the family, adults and children, in the setting of her own home. In each home, we have arranged to make a videotape of the child playing some rhyming and writing games together with an older sibling or neighborhood playmate, and of an adult caregiver reading a storybook to the child.

For the school context, we have asked the class teacher to describe the various class activities, and to explain to us the significance of those activities from her perspective as a teacher, as well as discussing with us the progress of each child within the curriculum. We have also observed the child interacting with the teacher and with other

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[1] Subsequently, during the period from the summer of 1994 to summer 1995, concurrently with the Cooperative Communication project, we increased the number of participating families in the Early Childhood Project, with a view to assessing the generality of our findings with greater confidence.

children in the classroom setting. In each school, we have arranged to videotape the participating children while they were playing with classmates in a "literacy corner" set up by the teacher in a corner of the classroom and designed to look like a little Post Office. We have also videotaped several of the class teachers reading a storybook to the children.

Finally, we have conducted one-on-one sessions with each child where s/he is encouraged to talk with us and perform various tasks to demonstrate skills and understanding. These "competency testing" sessions were held at each of the participating schools once in the Spring of 1993, and again in the Spring of 1994.

Several technical reports of the findings of the Early Childhood Project are now available (Baker et al., 1994; Sonnenschein et al., 1996), as well as reports situating the research relative to other research on child development, literacy and education (Baker et al. 1995; Sonnenschein et al. 1995; Thompson et al. 1995). During 1994, the Early Childhood Project also gave rise to independent reports by graduate student members of the project team on two aspects of the children's repertoire of literacy-related competencies: narrative accounts by children of their own recent personal experiences (Hill, 1994), and playful discourse among children while engaged in literacy-related activities (Morakinyo, 1994).

3. Methods

3.0 Project design and participants.

The sampling frame adopted for recruiting teachers to participate in the Cooperative Communication Project comprised all the pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers currently working in the schools participating in the Early Childhood Project.
All eligible teachers were invited to join a series of seminar discussions, out of which would grow plans for individual projects to be carried out by each teacher in the context of her or his professional work. Out of a total of 15 teachers at 8 schools, six teachers at three schools agreed to participate in our Inservice course on Cooperative Communication among Parents and Teachers about Children's Emergent Literacy, on the understanding that the Baltimore City Schools had approved the course as qualifying participants for inservice, continuing education credit. Three of these teachers were on the faculty of schools in which the Early Childhood Project was based from its inception. The other three teachers were on the faculty of a school that agreed to join the project during the summer of 1994, and where recruitment of children enrolled in first grade was currently under way. Overall the participants included three pre-

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Kindergarten class teachers and three Kindergarten teachers, two of whom dropped out of the course for personal reasons before embarking on their own action-research projects, leaving two pairs of teachers based at two different schools. Both of these schools catered to inner-city, low-income, residential communities of mixed African-American and European-American ethnicity. One member of each pair of teachers was herself African-American, the other European-American.

The project plan (NRRC, 1993, ps. 325-330) envisaged that during the seminar meetings the Early Childhood Project research team would share with teachers some of our own research findings concerning the relations between children's home experiences and their activities in school, as well as those of other researchers. Rather than extrapolating from these scientific data to general prescriptions for practice, we would invite teachers to co-construct with us detailed suggestions for innovative practices, to whose refinement their first-hand experience would make a crucial contribution in terms of practical relevance and feasibility. We would facilitate discussion among the teachers about their own beliefs and practices involving home-school connections; we would introduce them to the nature of teacher inquiry, and we would work with them to identify researchable questions for them to address during the 1994-95 academic year.

When designing their projects of action-research or reflective practice, we would seek to cultivate in the teachers an informally negotiated form of answerability, in which their professional accountability is interpreted as explaining and justifying to parents the educational decisions and actions they take. We would encourage the teachers to include parents as partners in their inquiries, given our ultimate goal of developing a model in which both groups engage fully, collaboratively, and enthusiastically.

We would continue holding the meetings throughout the year to afford teachers the opportunity to share their experiences and refine their questions. In addition, we would meet with the teachers individually to offer guidance and feedback as needed.

In order to analyze the co-constructive interactions between Early Childhood Project personnel and participating teachers we proposed to maintain a detailed continuous record, using video and audiotaping as well as written reports, of the evolving structure and content of the seminar discussions. The following phases were anticipated: (a) presentation and informally evaluative discussion of teacher testimony about their own beliefs and practices involving home-school connections based on first-hand experience; (b) discussion of the philosophy and methodology of teacher inquiry; (c) critical assessment and appropriation of theoretical constructs introduced in the presentation of

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research findings; (d) preliminary formulation of proposals for innovative practices; (e) evaluation of preliminary proposals in terms of practical relevance and feasibility; (f) identification of researchable questions; and (g) refinement of proposals to include both action/practice and research/inquiry components, a time-line for implementation, and a strategy for analysis and evaluation.

3.1 An exemplary list of relevant teacher-inquiry methods and strategies

During the summer of 1994, a search of the literature was conducted to identify a number of different types of inquiry that have been conducted by teachers that appeared relevant to the developmental domain of literacy in the pre-school period. The typology adopted was eclectically designed to focus on categories that would be familiar to preschool teachers, and was summarized in the form of a chart (reproduced as Figure 1). The chart, which was distributed to participating teachers at the end of the second session of the seminar, was deliberately entitled "a checklist of possible approaches", in order to underscore the fact that it was not conceived as either comprehensive or definitive. The concept of journal exchange between parents and teacher (category 3) was taken up in one of the projects eventually undertaken. Elements of categories 5 and 6 (sending home photocopies with blank lines for the parent to write in things that the child knows; and using the children's own narratives) were reflected in a second project. The generic concept of a play center in the classroom (category 8) was reflected in a third project. The fourth project undertaken built on elements of categories 4 and 5 (focus groups, and sending home photocopies of story books).

3.2 Formalizing the process as an educational opportunity for Pre-School Teachers: design of an In-service Course Syllabus.

In order to motivate teachers to participate in the project, it was deemed important to assure them that their work on this project would receive recognition by the public school system as an element of their professional development, which in turn might be considered grounds for their occupational advancement. In correspondence with the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) Department of Professional Development, Organizational Development, and Attitudinal Reform, an in-service course syllabus was designed with the following objectives:

- to sensitize teachers to contextual aspects of child development;
- to provide teachers with a set of analytical concepts for reflecting on their relationships with the families of children whom they teach;
- to orient teachers to effective ways of combining instructional activity with either

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exploratory inquiry or formative evaluation;

. to stimulate in several schools a spirit of inquiry about ways of enhancing existing relations between the school and the community it serves.

At the request of the school system, a detailed chart was prepared specifying educational objectives of each projected session, outlining the activities, assignments and resources that would be involved, and listing the criteria that would be used to evaluate the participants' performance (see Figure 2). In response to concerns raised by the BCPS, the expectation that participants would prepare themselves for each session was made explicit in the syllabus by including the expression "homework". While this stipulation was probably helpful in alerting the UMBC personnel to the need to offer structured guidance to the teachers, it may also have contributed to feelings of asymmetry between the obligations of the two groups of participants, and perhaps intensified the plausibility of an expert/novice dichotomy that we were striving to avoid. The syllabus was in due course approved by the BCPS as the basis for participant teachers to earn two units of inservice, continuing education credit within the school system's scheme for professional development.

4. The seminar discussions

Four seminar sessions were held at the UMBC campus during September-November 1994 on Saturday mornings from 9-1 spread over a period of 6 weeks. All sessions were tape-recorded, and one session was also partly videotaped. Teachers received lecture and video presentations about completed research, including several components of the ongoing Early Childhood Project at UMBC, and discussed the relevance of the research to their own experiences and concerns in their positions as teachers catering to low-income, inner-city families. Between sessions they read assigned readings, and maintained a journal in which they recorded their reactions to the various ideas raised.

The seminar, which (in order to conform with the standard expectations of the school system) was described in the syllabus as sessions of a course (Figure 2), was conceptualized by the principal investigators of the project as an opportunity for exchange of ideas among a diverse group of professionals. The process envisaged was described as follows in the project proposal:

"During the meetings we will share with teachers some of our own research findings concerning the relations between children's home experiences and their activities in school, as well as those of other researchers. Rather than extrapolating from these

scientific data to general prescriptions for practice, we will invite teachers to co-construct with us detailed suggestions for innovative practices, to whose refinement their first-hand experience will make a crucial contribution in terms of practical relevance and feasibility. We will facilitate discussion among the teachers about their own beliefs and practices involving home-school connections; we will introduce them to teacher inquiry, if they are not already familiar with it; and we will work with them to identify researchable questions for them to address during the 1994-95 academic year.

"When designing their projects of action-research or reflective practice, we will seek to cultivate in the teachers an informally negotiated form of answerability, in which their professional accountability is interpreted as explaining and justifying to parents the educational decisions and actions they take. We will encourage the teachers to include parents as partners in their inquiries, given our ultimate goal of developing a model in which both groups engage fully, collaboratively, and enthusiastically.

"We will continue holding the meetings throughout the year to afford teachers the opportunity to share their experiences and refine their questions. In addition, we will meet with the teachers individually to offer guidance and feedback as needed" (Serpell, Baker & Sonnenschein, 1993).

Figure 3 summarizes the main topics and key theoretical concepts that were introduced for explicit discussion during the seminar sessions. Although these topics were listed in the form of an agenda distributed at the beginning of each session, they only intermittently served to define the focus of discussion. Much of the time they functioned as stimuli for the elicitation of testimony from individual teachers about their own beliefs and practices involving home-school connections based on first-hand experience. These testimonial presentations in turn gave rise to a free-floating, informally evaluative discussion. Detailed analysis of that discourse will have to await a future report. But a few illustrative excerpts are presented in Figures 4 and 5.

In the excerpt transcribed in Figure 4, the discussion was triggered by a report on the methods of an intervention project by Moll and his colleagues (1990) that mobilized cultural "funds of knowledge" from within the local community as educational resources for the work of a public elementary school in Arizona. Note how, although the focus of the research paper was explicitly contrasted with local conditions, it nevertheless served as an effective stimulus for all four of the teachers to describe relevant experiences, and to co-construct an evaluation of them. The teachers' emotionally charged, narrative exposition of their own experiences served as a source of bonding among them as a group of professionals who often perceive themselves as

somewhat embattled. They also afforded hermeneutical opportunities for building bridges between the (often somewhat inaccessible) formulations of knowledge in research reports and the more tangible reality attributed to knowledge grounded in practical experience.

In Figure 5, we reproduce a series of segments taken from the discussion arising from three different readings. The report by Comer summarizes the experience of his school development project in Connecticut, described in more detail in his book, *School Power* (Comer, 1980), and situates it in relation to personal recollections of his own childhood. The report also cites some evaluation of the project's longer-term outcomes, including larger scale replications in recent years in the public school systems of several states, including Maryland. Some of the phrasing of this report proved to be quite provocative for several of the participants, and a considerable amount of time was devoted to contesting alternative interpretations of the author's philosophy. His emphasis on the importance of institutional coherence gave rise to unexpectedly vivid descriptions of some internal conflicts of the sort that arise periodically among the faculty of a single school, generating a climate that is incompatible with cordial, cooperative relations between the school and the community it aspires to serve. Although these particular reactions appeared tangential to the prescribed focus of the session, one the participants demonstrated, in the first segment reproduced in Figure 5, an appreciation of the relevance of this research to problems she had encountered in her professional work.

In the next segment the notion that problems of cross-cultural communication arise primarily with children from abroad gives way to a recognition that the nature of the clashes in perspective between themselves as teachers and the American families from which most of their pupils come are cultural in character. Jordan's paper contrasts several different approaches to the interface between culture and the design of preschool education, and makes the case that the classroom and the school have cultural characteristics of their own that deserve attention in the assessment of cultural appropriateness.

Goldenberg, Reese and Gallimore's paper describes the philosophy, methodology and findings of an intervention project designed to improve the reading skills of young Hispanic students by sending home books for the parents to read to them. Contrary to the expectations that parents would focus on the meaning of the stories, many parents used the books as a resource for teaching skills of letter recognition and spelling/sound correspondences. As the transcripts illustrate the evaluation of this outcome proved to

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be quite provocative for our participants. Interestingly, the teacher who was inclined to accept any type of parental involvement as a sign of positive impact digressed to provide a very skeptical account of a program at her school where a "master teacher comes down every day from his castle and gives the word of the day", which is intended to enrich the educational program of the whole school. She and her colleague at the same school then proceeded to illustrate with gusto some of the absurdities that arise when such external inputs are injected thoughtlessly into a self-governing institution such as an elementary school (see Figure 5, end-note 1).

There was a quality of vibrant engagement in these discussions that impressed all of the researchers. The teachers arrived early each Saturday morning and plunged immediately into intense conversation, so that when the agreed time to begin arrived, the facilitators had to interrupt in order to get the session started on its prescribed agenda. And at the end of each morning, the teachers tended to linger for quite some time beyond the agreed time. One relevant insight shared with us by one of the teachers was: "it's so good to have some adult conversation!" Of course, none of these teachers live in isolation from other adults. The adult conversation that they relished in these seminars was attractive because of its focus on the child-centered topic of early education in a way that acknowledged both the topic and their professional opinions as worthy of serious adult attention.

Beginning in the third seminar session, with the assistance of a set of guidelines, each teacher also began to develop a proposal for an individual teacher-inquiry/ action-research project, and received formative evaluation and support in articulating an operational plan for implementation of the project at her school between January and May 1995. This process was roughly organized in terms of the following sequence of steps:

- preliminary formulation of proposals for innovative practices;
- evaluation of preliminary proposals in terms of practical relevance and feasibility;
- identification of researchable questions;
- refinement of proposals to include both action/practice and research/inquiry components, a time-line for implementation, and a strategy for analysis and evaluation.

Four project proposals were eventually concretized and implemented. Each teacher received several tutorial visits at her school by a member of the ECP research team over the period from December through May, designed to further focus her project proposal, and to support and monitor its implementation.

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5. The teacher-inquiry projects

5.1 Project development ; structuring, in-flight responsiveness.

Several of the participant teachers expressed misgivings in the earlier sessions about whether they had the necessary expertise to undertake an independent action research project. Nevertheless, the initial inspiration for several of the projects undertaken can be identified within the transcripts of discussions arising from some of the assigned readings. For instance, during session 2 of the seminar, one teacher sought further clarification of the multiple uses of the concept of ZPD by the authors of different studies that had been presented. One of the research team explained:

"both McNamee and Moll seem to be trying to use this idea of zone of proximal development not just for individual, we saw that this doesn't have to be of the child, it can be the ability of the teacher or it can be the parent. But also for the relationship between individuals, so the classroom can be said, well, where could this classroom move? What are we doing in this classroom? And again if you make too sudden a change, then it may not be possible for the classroom as a group to cope with it. Likewise the relation between the school and the community, that there is a zone, there is something going on there, like the communication we discussed just now. But eventually one would like it to be a much different relationship, a much healthier relationship where there's a lot of trust and cooperation"

PT1: An independent, I remember a independent relationship.

UR2: So what would it mean for them to independently ... ?

PT1: ... remember they didn't really achieve that part of it. Now what would it mean to be independent? I don't know if it would be like, instead of using the basal reader, they are doing the whole language approach - and eventually the classroom, the teacher would be using the whole language approach rather than the basal reader" Would that be an analogy?

UR2: I think that would be a great example, yes. Can they move from teachers insisting 'where is my basal?' to parents insisting.

PT1: I can see myself already questioning that sort of ... in my room. And I'm already going with the idea of purchasing. But I'd like to have a set of Dr. Zeuss books, I still want 5 or 10 books so that we can all read them in a little group.

UR2: Right, in other words, you don't want to throw the whole thing out but you also want to move somewhere

PT1: ... use better forms of literature. That might be a start for me. So I can see already that some of my thoughts are leading that way. And it might be interesting to see how I develop in that area and how much..."

The project that emerged from these preliminary ruminations adopted the format of a class lending library, that was conceived as "a vehicle which fostered comunication between the child's home and school" (see 5.3.1 below).

Later in the same session, Tunde Morakinyo gave an account of his research project on children's playful discourse recorded in several kindergarten classrooms, two of whose teachers were participating in the seminar. The play was organised around a pretending Post Office, and he explained that: "each teacher had decided how they wanted to introduce it", in the classroom. One of the teachers illustrated this as follows: "from the beginning I did little notes to them. I would also draw a picture of something, a smile or something and put it in the box. And then maybe one day one of the ...

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would deliver it to, some of them could read the names that were put in there and I have boxes in my room where they put their stuff in so they just put it in the box." At this point, PT2 intervened excitedly:
" Alright, so where did you, let's talk about ... now. Where did the money come from for the envelopes ?"
Tunde Morakino replied: "Oh, I brought them in. I brought play money in also. And the ... stampers and the pads."
Later, as the discussion of this research method progressed, he explained that when deciding how to structure the classroom literacy centers, "I chose the post office because I thought it would be more convincing to people. They would say, oh yeah, that's related to literacy, we can see them reading and writing. But I agree with you, other areas are important too. I mean, learning how to cook, learning ... , right, that's important too."
PT2 joined in with the observation:
"Yes but if you had got a supermarket, I think, and cooking, it would have been more female dominated, because boys tend to think, although all young boys like to cook, they tend to think: 'oh, what a ... mommy does that'!"
This may have been the first germ of the corner store concept that became the framework for her inquiry project (see 5.3.2 below).

In the third session a handout was distributed entitled "Guidelines For a Process of Developing an Action-Research, Teacher-Inquiry Project From the Base of a Public Pre-school". The document identified the following sequence of steps:

1. **Defining the problem:**
   What would I like to change? Why am I dissatisfied with the present situation?What am I uncertain about, so that I feel the need to conduct an inquiry? what would I like to know that I do not already know?
2. **Focusing:**
   Given that I cannot hope to solve this whole problem at one go, narrow down the problem to a manageable set of questions that I could hope to address over the time period available for this project, given my current situation as a preschool teacher at a particular school, and with limited resources.
3. **Choosing a method:**
   Has anything like this ever been attempted before? If so, would any of the methods used in earlier research on similar topics serve my purpose? Would they be feasible for me? How could I adapt and/or improve on them?
4. **Specifying the project in operational terms:**
   What will I observe?
   How will I get an opportunity to make such observations?
   How will I record my observations?
   How will I analyze my observations?
5. **Ethical considerations**
6. **Getting down to brass tacks**
   Planned phases of project activity:
   Who will do what when and with what result?

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7. **Resource needs**
   Itemized budget
8. **Reporting on the project** (further guidance on this was provided at a later stage)

Tharp and Gallimore (1988), in their seminal book entitled "Rousing minds to life: teaching, learning and schooling in social context," have coined the expression "in flight responsiveness" to refer to a mode of instructional support that contributes in a flexibly constructive way to "assisting performance through the student's zone of proximal development (ZPD)", be it for a young child (Chapter 2) or for a teacher (Chapter 10). Building on Vygotsky's original formulation of the ZPD and his conception of teaching as requiring attunement to the individual's ZPD, Tharp and Gallimore advocate a mode of instructional discourse that capitalizes on the ideas and knowledge that the student brings to the task of comprehension. Skilful instruction in this mode depends primarily on a willingness to respond constructively to the student's initiatives, first acknowledging, then elaborating and extending the student's own insights, rather than imposing a pre-conceived learning agenda on the student.

We attempted to follow these principles in prompting and supporting the pre-school teacher participants as they designed their individual inquiry projects. Thus in session 3, the guidelines document was introduced as follows:

"Well, 'guidelines' sounds very directive. We thought that just as the schools in Comer's project felt the need for structure, we probably need some kind of structure to get a sense of progress and we were very excited with the notes which you all sent us *(referring to notes generated by each teacher prior to this session, and collected during the preceding week.)* We wanted to actually see what was in your minds before we sat down and talked about it. And we're very grateful to you for making that effort. And we've discussed them with one another, what each of you has said about their interests and plans. And we'll talk about this in more detail. The steps that we've got here, we're expecting basically today to talk about steps one through three. And ... hopefully in the tutorial, small group discussions, you'll be able to move forward from three to four and maybe be able to talk a little bit about the other ones but mainly moving towards getting something operational."

The session leader then concretized step 1 as follows, citing ideas submitted by the participating preschool teachers:

"PT5, you said that one of the things that you would like to change is to expose children to different avenues of learning through positive experiences. PT6 would like to increase children's interest in reading. PT2 would like to increase ... the level of

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literacy. And PT 3 would like to empower parents. PT4 would like 'to have parents feel more comfortable with me'. And PT1 would like to have parents acquire a more realistic understanding and acceptance of their child's social and academic strengths. Now each of you said several other things and I just took one example from each of you, but you did actually make some goal statements there of things which you see as less satisfactory now than you would like them to be. And that's one way of focusing an inquiry project, especially an action research inquiry project."

Likewise, step 2 ("focusing") was illustrated with reference to particular teachers' emerging foci of interest, as follows:

"a complementary set of questions is: what am I uncertain about so that I feel a need to conduct inquiry? What would I like to know that I do not already know? ... PT2, you had a question which I remember you shared a little bit last time when we were together: 'How does a child's play differ at home from play at school? You see them playing at school. What's going on at home?' That's an area where you would like to know more. It would inform your movement towards one of your goals....

Now you'll notice ... from those examples, that they are pretty ambitious, a lot of these things: ... they're big goals and big areas of knowledge that one would like to know about. And so this focusing step is a disciplining step to try to feel that by the end of a certain period of time, you've actually made some progress. ... Research is always an ambitious enterprise. And I think it is very good to have a very high profile, grand goal in mind to start. As I said this kind of beacon towards which you are moving. It is also helpful in planning and to have a sense of progress, to set yourself some more limited goals that are on the way to the beacon. Rather than saying 'if I don't reach the beacon in six months, then I've failed', set yourself one step towards it. So with these ambitious goals we've been talking about, empowering parents, PT3, I guess the first sort of way of focusing is to ask yourself: 'in what domain do I want to empower them?' And then, perhaps 'what sort of outcomes might I hope for in three months?' We're talking about January through March or January through April. What kind of empowerment could I realistically bring about over that small period of time, which might be the beginning of a process which - if we take Comer's example: over 12 years he claims to be able to say..'look: I empowered parents so that the next generation of children have higher school grades'. That may not be something that you will expect to happen in three months. But you can try to identify something that is empowering but also realistic within the framework of what you what you are trying to do. ... PT1, you want parents to have a more realistic understanding of their children's strengths? What type of strengths do you want to try to have them understand? What would be a manageable step forward in terms of enhancing their understanding?

When you have those slightly more modestly defined goals, it becomes much

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easier to address the third question on the list which is this one of methods, choosing a method. One way of choosing a method is to start from these goals and say 'what is the most efficient way of achieving that goal that I've set myself?' But we noticed that a number of you have already become very interested in a method which you've seen that somebody else has been using. And that was indeed one of our reasons for trying to have in the first couple of sessions some worked examples of completed research by teachers and people who do systematic inquiry around early development of literacy. We wanted you to see what's involved concretely in using a method to get some information. And it's perfectly reasonable to suppose that one of your criteria in defining what you are going to do is that you really like the idea of a method. 'This is something which I feel would fit within the framework of what I already do. I'd like to try this. It would sort of build on what I am already doing. It feels like a comfortable style.' So some of your projects may be at least driven by your desire to use a method rather than driven by the goal which you are setting. ...

There is a little bit of a balancing act here between the choice of method and the choice of goal.... Let's look at some of the methods that you've expressed an interest in already. PT1, you talked about visits to the library as a method. PT4, you talked about paren/teacher discussion groups. PT3, you talked about parent/child/teacher interactive homework and you also talked about home visiting during work hours. PT2, you talked about inviting senior citizens in to read the children stories. ... So each of those is an actual intervention. It's a thing which you would say 'well I'm not doing this now, but I'm going to do it'. Or maybe, 'I've done it before but I'm going to watch carefully to see what flows from my doing this activity. So it's a method which is active but which will also make visible to you certain things but which will also allow you to inquire in greater depth into something. But you can see that some of these would be more applicable to one goal than to another. Visits to the library may be less relevant for instance to 'making parents feel more comfortable with me' than to 'exposing children to different avenues of learning'. And so, the matching of the method you want to use to an appropriate set of goals is important.

I think we want to be open-ended to some extent about the outcome of these methods. In other words, you might want to in some cases, to say 'well, I really think that this method has the potential to address a number of goals'. I might think that by doing home visiting, for instance, I might learn a variety of different things about families, but I might also enhance the quality of trust between me and the parents to aspects of what I'm doing that they don't get to see because they stay such a short time at home. So there would be outcomes for the parents as well as outcomes for me in terms of mutual understanding. So that would be at least two sets of goals there. You might be able to subsume them under the heading of enhancing trust or enhancing mutual understanding. But you are also going to list several goals.

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And the other point of course is that the methods which appeal to you are partly appealing you to because of feasibility. They're things (about) which you feel: 'I could do this'."

These ideas were then taken up and explored in more detail in smaller group, tutorial sessions.

5.2 Project implementation; monitoring, encouraging.

Following the fifth seminar session held at the University campus in January 1995, the instructional support offered to teachers centered on their implementation of the action-research projects they had planned, within the context of their several regular working bases in their respective schools.The responsibility of visiting each teacher at her school about once a month was assigned to Linda Gorham, a member of the Early Childhood Project research team. As a graduate student enrolled in the UMBC graduate program in Applied Developmental Psychology, Linda Gorham also conceptualized this activity as a "practicum" learning experience for herself, affording a unique opportunity to acquire additional insights into the applied nature of developmental research, the role of academia in initiating and supporting school reform, the kinds of research approaches best suited for educational settings and readily adapted by classroom teachers, and the "inner workings" of the public school system (from the teacher's perspective).

The bridging goals of the Cooperative Communication Project derived additional benefit from her fund of long professional experience as the Director of a private preschool facility serving an inner-city neighborhood similar to those served by the participating schools in the project, and from her accessibility as a resource person with whom teachers could identify as a colleague in the early childhood profession.

From her perspective as the intermediary between the now scattered teachers and the coordinators of the project at the university, she recorded the following observations and reflections:

"**The teacher-inquiry projects**
I had a thought-provoking experience that grew out of one of the planning sessions designed to help teachers formulate their inquiry projects. The kindergarten teacher with whom I was paired told me during our one-on-one planning session that she was considering doing an action research project based on sight words from a basal reader

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normally introduced in her school to children in the first grade. As I listened to her explain her idea, I felt compelled to steer her away from the basal sight word task in favor of what I deemed would be a more appropriate, but similar, project based on environmental print. I reasoned to myself that although it was important to respect the teacher's ideas, I was obligated in my current role to share with her my understandings of emergent literacy and to encourage her that she could achieve essentially the same objectives of promoting children's literacy development and engaging in cooperative communication with parents while, at the same time, using an approach supported by current literacy research. Together, we devised what I thought was an innovative plan.

However, when the whole group reconvened at the conclusion of the one-on-one planning sessions and it was time for each teacher to present their plan, the teacher with whom I worked seemed confused and uncertain about exactly what "her" plan was and how she was going to implement it. As I listened to her flounder in her interpretation of her planning session with me, I learned first-hand about the concept of "appropriation". I accepted this experience as my lesson in understanding that teachers must have ownership of their inquiry projects and that my role in assisting teachers was, in essence, to provide the tools, not build the house. Eventually, the teacher returned to her original idea and developed from it a very effective teacher-inquiry project that helped her communicate with parents about children's literacy.

One of my more unique responsibilities within the course of inservice, continuing education was to conduct monthly on-site visits to teachers at their schools over a five-month period. The on-site visits were always scheduled according to teachers' preferences, which was always at the end of the school day. However, each time I arrived, I found teachers harried and exhausted. I soon discovered that my support role involved providing large doses of reassurance. Teachers needed to hear that they were indeed progressing nicely on their research, that project deadlines were devised to provide structure, not pressure, that I would help them develop strategies for collecting, recording, and evaluating data, and, despite any indications to the contrary, that they could successfully complete the task they had set for themselves. Always concerned about being judged based on the quality of their performance, teachers asked me over and over again, "Am I doing this (the research) right?". Constant apologies were made for what they regarded as their own shortcomings in penmanship, organization, neatness, or preparedness. Consequently I made a concerted effort to put them at ease, talking to them about their work day, complimenting them on the design of and materials in their classrooms, and affirming their competency as they shared with me their ideas.

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After the second site visit, I realized that more frequent visits would have been better than my once-a-month appearances and that teachers were under enormous pressures to perform a hodge-podge of tasks nearly everyday. A shortage of time was what teachers most lamented but it was obvious that they appreciated my visits and regarded them as opportunities to focus attention on their research projects.

In addition to recommending weekly support for a seminar of this nature, based on my experiences conducting on-site visits, I also recommend that the research team try to generate administrative support (from school principals) for teachers involved in the project. Teachers would obviously benefit from having administrators who understand the level of commitment required to complete an action research project in addition to teachers' daily responsibilities. Having administrators who are willing to provide teachers with resource persons to assist teachers in completing routine tasks such as completing attendance forms or to relieve them of labor-intensive tasks such as monitoring children during lunch time or at the conclusion of the school day would help reduce some of the time constraints and the associated pressure teachers face as they try to find answers to questions they have raised about themselves, the children they teach, and the families they impact." (Gorham, 1995).

5.3 Project reporting

The sixth and final seminar session of the In-service course approved by the BCPS was the occasion of an oral report by each of the four participating teachers on her action-research project. This took place at the University campus in May 1995. The session, which was attended by five members of the research team and the four teachers who completed individual inquiry projects, was video-taped.

A wide variety of concrete products (including a number of audiotapes, videotapes, wall charts, still photographs and handwritten diaries) was generated by the individual teacher-inquiry projects. A catalog of these products, which were displayed at the final seminar session, and subsequently deposited with the Early Childhood Project, appears in the Appendix.

During the following summer, each teacher finalized a written version of her project report, and these are summarized below, drawing on both the written reports and a transcript of the oral presentation that was made at the seminar.

5.3.1 Promoting storybook reading to kindergartners at home through the creation of a class lending library

"As a kindergarten teacher, I am aware of the importance of the home environment in young children's beginning reading. Children accomplish reading skills with the support of parents who provide an environment rich in varied and positive experiences with print for their children. Most of the printed material a young child comes in contact with at an early age is in the form of a story. According to Baker, Serpell, and Sonnenschein (1995), joint storybook reading gives a child an opportunity to:

1. Learn about print.
2. Learn about the structure of a story.
3. Learn about the sounds of the language.
4. Develop a positive attitude towards reading when parents show by their behavior that reading is fun and important.

Therefore, I wanted to know more about kindergarten children's storybook reading experiences at home so that I could better understand and help them in their literacy development. I wanted to find out:

1. What kind of books were being read to the children?
2. How often were the readings?
3. Who was doing the reading?
4. Was anyone checking for comprehension?
5. Where were the parents getting the books?
6. Was storybook reading enjoyable for them?

To address these questions, I created a lending library in January, 1995. I chose this approach because the library was rich in literacy material, developmentally appropriate for five-year olds and was the connecting vehicle which facilitated the communication between the child's school and home. This inquiry led to a rich interaction between child, parent, and teacher. I conducted a series of interviews, group discussions, and sent questionnaires home to be completed by parents and children.

Method

Background: The School and the Children

Our Elementary School includes grades Pre-K through second, and is located in the

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Southwestern area of Baltimore's inner city. The surrounding neighborhood is populated by low-income African-American families. On our A.M. Kindergarten roll, we have eighteen African-Americans who live in the community and nine European-Americans who are bused into our school.

Letters to parents

I sent home an article from the Sun paper called "Children learn the value of 'Starting With Words'". The article stresses the importance of parents readings to their children. The preschool literacy program was started in Sandtown in West Baltimore, a community near out West Baltimore school.

Along with this article, I sent home a letter that introduced the lending library project to the parents and informed them of their child's responsibilities when borrowing books from the library.

The Lending Library

Our lending library was located on a long counter top in the back of our classroom. An open book logo made out of yellow construction paper with the word "library" printed on it identified this area in our class room. behind the counter top was a bulletin board with the children's art work and a large book logo containing book jackets from our library books. Eight corrugated boxes housed the 100 paperback books which were purchased for $99 from the Scholastic Book Company. Each book had a number written on the front cover and on the index card where the title of the book was printed. This enabled the children to identify the books by numbers. The index card was placed in a paper pocket in the inside back cover of the book A 2" x 3" white sticker was glued on the back cover to provide space for a return date. I kept a master list of the books and added to this inventory as more books were added to the library.

Two tote trays held the date stamps, stamp pads, pencils and evaluation papers. The evaluation papers were placed in each book so that they could be completed at home and returned with the book. These evaluations helped me in assessing which books the enjoyed and why the children liked or did not like the book. Students were allowed to keep the book for one week. However, many of the children returned their books in a few days and selected other ones.

When borrowing books, children would print their names on the index cards, and the librarian would place the cards in a green basket which held the cards until the books were returned. A return date would be stamped on the white sticker on the back of each book.

When children returned a book, the librarian would find the index card with the number that corresponded with the book and stamp a return date next to the child's name on the card. The completed evaluation slip would be placed in an envelope marked.

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"For Teacher". A fresh evaluation slip and the index card would be placed in the book's pocket and returned to the library for circulation.

Our library was open in the morning from 8:25 a.m. until 8:45 a.m. Since our children eat breakfast at school, their entrance into the class room was staggered. This arrangement allowed small groups of children to visit the library at one time. Our P.M. class entered the room at 11:30 a.m. and selected their books before going to the cafeteria. Returns were received at these times.

Three children a week were selected to work in the library. They pinned on an open book logo name tag with the name, "librarian", printed on it. As the year progressed, every child has the experience of becoming the librarian and "lender" of books.

Questionnaires and Interviews

I needed information from the children and the parents in my class in order to complete my inquiry. Therefore, in April 1995 I sent a parent's and a children's questionnaire home to be completed and returned to school. Fourteen families replied by completing these forms. Five Euro-American girls, one Euro-American boy, three African-American boys, and five African-American girls participated in the study. Five of the families were headed by single parents and nine were headed by two adults. All of the children except five had at least one sibling in the home. Parents and children also participated in interviews and discussion groups."

(A more detailed account of this project including details of parental and child responses is in preparation for publication elsewhere.)

The author ended her report with the following summary and conclusions:

"My research has reinforced many of the ideas that I have had about reading to children. Early exposure to print encourages children to read for enjoyment and to understand the function and meaning of the printed word. Another positive effect is it familiarizes the child with the structure of a narrative, understanding the sounds in our language and the meanings of words. I believe this research project has allowed me to know more about children's storybook reading experiences in the home and how their parents feel about reading to their children. This insight will help me to work with parents and children so that we, together, can continue to increase the storybook reading in the home to develop a literacy program that will better meet children's needs.

The lending library proved to be an exciting vehicle which fostered communication between the child's home and school. But the rich interaction that was taking place transcended the lending library; the rapport between parents, children and school was improving in areas other than the library. I observed increased participation on class trips

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parties, perfect attendance assemblies and closing activities. I also experienced much more parent involvement in the day to day activities in the classroom such as: checking homework, assisting children with difficult skills and giving additional encouragement - assistance to those children in need. When the children saw their parents and other parents participating in their education, it gave them support, led to a much more positive attitude towards learning and made school a very important place.

Involving parents more closely in their children's education fostered a group cohesion that motivated a culminating activity sponsored by both A.M. and P.M. parents. During the last week of school, the parents put on a group surprise luncheon which they had worked on for weeks. Everyone was invited (children/parents) and participated in this closing activity. I felt more appreciated than in many years before. I feel that the reason this happened was a closeness developed between home and school because of the interaction that occurred this year through the lending library.

I too had a more positive attitude this year. When a parent came in with a suggestion or a complaint, I tried to view the concern from the parent's and child's perspective as well as my own. I had more patience because I had so much emotional and physical support. I was enjoying my job; this feeling of joy motivated me to teach. I invited the parents to school to view the lending library video and served refreshments to the parents and children. We shared comments about the delightful activities of the children in the video; this was another positive experience.

To my disappointment, I found that the parents and children were still not using the public library to as great a degree as I had wished. Many felt that the neighborhood was unsafe. Perhaps next year, I will plan a field trip to the Enoch Pratt Central Library to encourage using public transportation to extend one's quest for knowledge.

Another problem that occurred was that out of an inventory of 118 books, 20 were not returned. However, the benefits of the project far outweighed any loss that occurred.

Some recommendations that I will make to myself for next year would be to start the project earlier, involve more parents and children in individual and group discussions and invite more parents to come in and share a story.

I feel that this project was so successful that I would like to share it with all members of the faculty. I feel each classroom could benefit from my research by establishing a lending library for each class or through the main library at our school.

5.3.2 The corner store project on children's emergent literacy

"Introduction and rationale

Kindergarten has changed a lot in the past 20 years. I remember when my younger sister would come home, and tell us about her day and how much she loved going to kindergarten. I used to listen and anticipate the day when I would become a kindergarten

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teacher. However, kindergarten is a lot different today than it was when my sister was in school. There are a lot of demands on young children today, such as basal text reading, standardized testing, and the requirement that your child must be able to read when they enter first grade. These requirements were not mandatory 20 years ago. I have felt pressured not only from the administration, but also from the parents. When discussing the children's development with the parents, they seem to be interested in only one question: "Is my child going to learn how to read?'

I wondered how many parents thought of their children as readers. I wanted them to understand that their children were already readers and that they had begun long before they entered my class. For my project I designed a corner store which reflected the neighborhood of the children. I built this in the corner of my housekeeping section. My purpose was to show writing and reading as an integrated part of the emergent literacy process. I also wanted to provide a center where the children would be encouraged to explore writing and reading as a means of self-expression and communication.

Method of Inquiry

I wanted to involve both classes in my study, but I limited the families in my study to the A.M. class. I wanted to choose children with various writing and reading strengths. The five children I chose reflected different levels of literacy skills. I will now give you a brief description of each child and their family situation.

CHILD I

Child I is a five year old African-American male. He lives with his mother and four brothers. He is the youngest son. There is a 13 year difference between he and his brother. His mom is a single mom attending a community college to become a paramedic. I have only heard about his father twice since he has been in my class. He was very sick as a baby and had to have open heart surgery as an infant. He is an asthmatic whose mother is very protective of him. When he first came to my class in September, he would cry everyday for his mom. His mom also suffered separation anxiety. She would stay in school for the entire morning session. She would stay in my room or another classroom. He receives speech services twice a week. His ability to recognize letters is very low -- 11 our of 52. He is also experiencing difficulty with his fine motor skills.

CHILD II

Child II is a five year old, African-American male. He lives with his mother, father, and younger sister. His dad works in a printing factory and his mom is in the Army Reserves. He was just diagnosed with asthma this school year. He is a very active child and discipline is something his mom and I work on all the time. He has high letter recognition skills 52/52, and he loves to write. He also loves to read books and brings

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them from home to share with the class. His mom donated the cash register and the pricing gun for our store.

CHILD III

Child III is a five year old Caucasian male. He lives with his mother, grandmother, and two older sisters. His mom works at a hospital as a nurses' aide. His father is not in his life. Child III was a preemie, only weighing 1.5 pounds at birth. He was a very sickly child who had a shunt in his head. He was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. He has been in special pre-K programs since he was born. When he came to kindergarten we were told that the cerebral palsy was under control (recently the doctor said it had returned in his legs). His letter recognition is very low 6/52, and his writing skills were non-recognizable. He has a love for books like no other child I have ever had. He loves to hear stories and for you to read books to him. He has a great memory and can remember the smallest detail of stories.

CHILD IV

Child IV is a six year old Caucasian female. She lives with her mother, Father, grandmother, and younger brother. Her mom and dad work. She is a very loving and quiet child who loves giving hugs. Her letter recognition is high 45/52, and she has great fine motor skills. She loves to write me letters and bring them class. She also has a great gift in art; her mom is very creative (home-made candies and crafts). This is where she probably gets her talent from.

CHILD V

Child V is a six year old Caucasian female. She lives with her mother, father, and baby brother. Her father is a mechanic and her mom was going to school for her GED. She is a pleasant and happy child and until recently has been thought to tune you out. But based on a recent hearing screening,she may be experiencing problems with her hearing. The tester said that she failed her hearing test and must go the doctor for a complete diagnostic test. Her letter recognition skill is moderate 29/52, and her fine motor skills are average. She loves for anyone who walks into the room to read her a story.

The first thing I had to do was to see if the parents of these children thought of their children as readers. I used a method I had read about in an article, "A Study of Environmental Print" by R.J.Canady. In this study he wanted to know if the children regarded themselves as readers. He took labels from different foods and asked the children to read the labels. He presented the labels in many forms to the children and the children only thought of themselves as readers when the labels were presented in a bonded book form. I wanted to try this same kind of experiment with my group. I decided to use

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fast food logos instead of food labels (McDonald's, Checkers, KFC, Wendy's, and Burger King). I did this with the whole class during the small group time. When I asked the children if they thought that they were readers, they all replied "yes" (this is probably because I tell them they are readers on the first day that they enter the room). I then shared the result of the test with the parents of the children in the study, and asked them if they thought that their children were readers. These were the responses of the study children's parents:

Parent 1: No, he is not really reading.
Parent 2: Somewhat but it's not really reading.
Parent 3: Yes, I think he is reading.
Parent 4: No, because she has been able to do that since she was two.
Parent 5: It's "kind of" reading, but wants her to read even more.

All the parents were interviewed individually and none agreed to be taped.

In The Beginning...

I began by sending a newsletter to all the parents which read, "Parent notice: We are opening a corner store in our room, a new center. We need your help! We need to borrow things that would be found in a corner store. Please send in canned or boxed foods, empty shampoo, lotion or any empty, safe container that we could pretend to sell."

Within the first week, parents sent an abundance of items. They responded in such a way that I had to send another notice to them the very next week asking them to stop sending items. I had accumulated more items than I had anticipated coming in, so I had to re-think how I would manage the space. I also had the problem of having supplies for the store without having a store front.

At the same time I wanted to begin my project, the school was getting ready for the standardized test (CTBS). I decided to use this wealth of materials from the project to help review some of the skills they would need for this test.

I used the items which the children brought in to make a graph. Graphing was a skill that was part of the test, so I incorporated it within the project. It would be used as a way of showing the children how a shopping list would look and how they must have one in order to make a purchase at the store. I used our Circle Time to set up the rules of the store.

The rules were as follows:

1. ONLY 2 CLERKS IN THE STORE.
2. YOU MUST HAVE A LIST TO MAKE A PURCHASE.
3. YOU MUST HAVE A RECEIPT TO RETURN ITEMS.

We also talked about the job of the clerks and set up their duties:

1. TAKE SHOPPING LIST.

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2. PLACE ALL ITEMS IN A BAG.
3. MAKE SURE EVERYONE HAS A RECEIPT.
4. STRAIGHTEN ALL THE ITEMS BEFORE YOU LEAVE.

We would role play with me as the mom, and they would go to the store for me after picking an item from the list which I wrote on large chart paper. After the child read the item they wanted to pick up, they would go to the store, purchase the item from the store clerk (which in the beginning was the assistant, Towson students, or parent volunteer) and return it to me to graph. This step was very successful because the children wanted to do it everyday.

They also wanted to pick the items that were on the list. I left the list up so that when the children had free time they could copy it. I would later see these lists in the children's journals.

After testing was completed, we opened the new center in the house-keeping section. The area had a store front, aprons, markers and papers for making lists, a cash register, and of course all the supplies. We placed it in the corner of the housekeeping section. We wanted the children to have a place where they would be able to write the list in a home environment and pretend with the food items.

The class is divided into four heterogeneous groups: red, yellows, orange, and green. Each group contains 6 or 7 children.

I use a wheel during small group time which tells the children where they will be working for the day. When their colored arrow points to a section, they go there and work for twenty minutes. I then give them the signal (blinking lights), and they move to the next section in the wheel. It takes two days for every group to have a turn at all of the activities of the wheel. The target children were spread between three of the groups. We began in April and all the children got a chance to play in the store at least once a week. I would pick the two store clerks in advance and place it on a chart so the children could read whose turn it was (see chart).

To make sure we had a good home-school connection, I sent home shopping lists for the children to complete at home and to bring in to shop at the corner store. If they returned the list, I would let them shop in the morning when they first came in. I would then stamp the list with a special talking stamp to take home and share with their parents. Of course, none of the food items ever went home. They would just bag up the items and then return them before the opening. During this time in the morning, either the parent, the student teacher or myself would be the storekeeper.

Findings and Discussion

I think that this was a wonderful project for my class. Being a whole language teacher, it was easy to fit this in with the regular program. I feel a great sense of responsibility in communicating with parents about their children. I have always been

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aware of the importance of the home environment in young children's beginning reading and writing experiences. What alarmed me in the beginning was that the parents rarely thought what their children did before entering school was important. Parents need to be aware that reading and writing emerge in natural stages, which are similar to the stages of speaking and listening. I hoped that through this project the parents would become more aware of the importance of seeing their child as a reader. I found that the key to successful communication can only be accomplished over time. If we as teachers join parents as partners, the children should reap the benefits. My parents were very pleased with the project and all said that they saw a big difference in their children's writing. This surprised me because I thought they would talk more about the reading they were doing. Although all the parents responded to their children's improving reading ability, they believed the biggest benefit from the store was the improvement in their children's writing.

I especially liked the way the parents volunteered in the store from time to time. They added new aspects to the store that I didn't think of, such as giving the children packaged items so they could copy the words off the packaging. They also assisted in the management of the section while the children were there so there would not be a long line of people in the store line. They would role play right along with the children.

Several of the parents let their children help them with the shopping. They would give them one or two items on a piece of paper and the children would find the items. These parents said that they would do this more often.

When it was time to close the store, the parents donated all the items to be used for next year. The parents were recognized during the closing exercise. They were given a certificate for all the items that they donated. The grandmother who made the aprons for the store, presented me with an apron after the closing.

I feel that this project worked well, and I will probably do this again next year, but start MUCH earlier.

5.3.3 Cooperative Communication: Pre-Kindergarten Home Assignments

"I began the project in November, 1994. I typically receive a poor and untimely response to nightly home assignments for a variety of reasons. I hoped to increase the number of returns by changing the nature of the homework. Usually skill-related dittos which require little parent/child time are given. This year's chores were designed which required students, parents, and teacher to think about and discuss selected topics. The next day during circle time we would share and compare the results. I wanted learning to be a shared activity between the family and the teacher. I wanted parents to realize how discussion and developing verbal skills are prerequisite to the development of early reading skills.

My goals for the project were to recruit parent participation in pre-kindergarten age

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children's induction into literacy through interactive homework assignments, collaboratively generated displays of student ideas, videotapes of classroom interactions, and sessions at the school for parents to inspect and discuss these products. Another goal was to increase the parents' level of comfort when they come into the school. I wanted my project to be useful in the usual classroom activities. Because of our constant situation of having no money available, I wanted to achieve a maximum in results with a minimal investment of time and money.

I worked with 40, four year old children enrolled in Baltimore City Public Pre-K and their parents. The entire group, both a.m. and p.m., were included in the study. Eighty-five percent of the students come from Section 8 housing. Their parents are unemployed or underemployed. The remaining 15% of the children live in row homes or small individual homes with one or two parents working in low to mid wage occupations such as, clerical, mechanical, or housekeeping related positions. Most of the children have both parents living in the home. The population is racially and sexually mixed, about half black, half white, half male, and half female. Due to the somewhat transient nature of our population the project was designed so participants could more or less, "drop in" to it. This way late and new entrants could be included. Materials were chosen that could be easily and inexpensively obtained by the parents and teacher. The black and white composition book was our homework book. This book housed our three way communication. I put their assignment in the book along with any special materials that the child needed, such as sentence strips or drawing paper. The parent/child response would return to school, usually by the following day, and be used during our daily "circle time" activity. Many of the assignments could be used even if they were returned late.

Videotapes and audiotapes were used to record some discussions. Some of the information was used to create classroom and hall displays. These are shown in photographs.

I had planned to have monthly meetings to invite parents to view the results. For various reasons, this was not an option. We had one scheduled meeting for parents to view the displays in March. At this time, I requested that visitors sign and complete a survey form (see forms). There was a fair turnout of parents to the meeting. some parents could not attend because of their work schedules. I actually got better feedback from parents, day care providers, and siblings who wandered into the room during the normal arrival and dismissal times each day. The comments made during the everyday, casual routine were specific, helpful, and critical in a positive way. The spontaneous conversation during the everyday coming and going routine was more productive than the results of the survey forms. Perhaps during the scheduled meeting the parents felt on the spot and gave guarded comments.

In December, we co-authored a book, **Our Families Prepare for Winter**. The children's assignment was to talk to their parent about different things that their families

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do to prepare for the winter. During circle time, we discussed these responses. I rewrote them on chart paper. The children then cut out magazine pictures to illustrate the statements. I compiled this into a "Big Book", which the children shared with parents when they came to retrieve them at the day's end (see sample-biggest book).

In December, for five days in succession, children were asked to take home a sentence strip and to have their parent write something that they could see, hear, taste, touch, or smell. Each day we discussed the responses during circle time. The strips were glued onto chart paper according to the particular attribute, then displayed in the hall. I observed the most attention to these charts as parents, siblings, and other caregivers and interested parties searched for their little precious one's contribution.

In January, we did homework related to shapes. Children searched their homes for objects of various shapes (see homework samples). We based our circle time on shapes that week. Some of the children and parents were very creative! I learned a lot about the homes that the children live in.

In February, during President's Week, I asked the children to take home a picture and a fact sheet about President Clinton. They were to share what we learned about him at school that day, then to have their parents write something else that they knew about him. This was made into a book.

I learned that many of our families are ambivalent or downright apathetic about their current presidential administration. This is not really surprising when you consider the typically low voter turnout from this area. It seemed like the few families were very knowledgeable.

In March, we were studying the theme Transportation. One assignment was to talk about cars at home. In school, the aide and I took turns writing one sentence for each child on a sentence strip, as each child shared. These were displayed in the hall (see photo). The display was loosely organized according to places to go, safety, and mechanics of the automobile. The children's comments reflected their personalities in a most delightful manner.

Another assignment, in March, was to draw a picture of a truck. these pictures were taped end to end forming a long roll and displayed on a T.V. type viewer. The children could wind and unwind the resultant roll to read our show about trucks. This taught us that trucks are important to our community. We also learned that some of our parents drive different types of trucks.

In April, we used our homework to make another Big Book. Children were to talk with their parents about how they prepare for the spring. The next day I wrote or rewrote their ideas on chart paper as before. This time the children illustrated the sentences. Afterwards, we put the pages together. Children excitedly brought their parents in to read the book to them (see book).

This assignment highlighted the many things that all families do in the spring. We

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had a lengthy discussion on this topic. Children enjoyed sharing details of barbecues, family outings, and warm weather play activities. I learned that many people in the area make time to spend special family time with their children.

We talked about insects in April. Homework was to talk about bugs or insects. This discussion was recorded on audiotape. Some of the children were inhibited by the tape recorder. This discussion was not as productive as some of the others, as children were more distracted by the tape recorder, than interested in the topic that day (see audiotape).

In May, we had a revisit to the five senses. Children were assigned for five consecutive evenings to have their parents write what they could see, hear, taste, touch, or smell on a sentence strip. The next day these were glued onto a chart according to the attribute. These were displayed in the hall (see photo). This display generated interest as children brought in their parents to see how their contribution was incorporated. We learned that the nature of some of our parents employment changes during the spring.

We continued the spring theme with a discussion about animals and their activities. This was recorded on videotape. This tape reflects the children mostly as they are. I learned that the children do not have adequate opportunity to observe animals in their environment. Knowledge about wild animals comes from parents, books, and television programs. Our children depend on the television to teach them a lot about the world outside their homes (see videotape).

The last assignment that I included in the project was about our last theme of the year, The Circus. children were asked to think about which circus worker they would like to be. They were to have their parent write what they were and something about the job. The plan was to arrange them on the T.V. format. There was a poor return on this assignment for a variety of reasons (parents were distracted by the closing of school festivities).

From my research, I learned that our families have a lot to share with their children and the school. Many of the families are employed in low paying or temporary positions. Many of our families have complicated and dependable structure of family support. While one member works, another takes over the child care duties.

I learned there are a lot of reasons why homework did not get done on a regular basis. Many children live in a chaotic situation. Not all of these are negative. Often with the flux of baby-sitters during the evening, the homework looses priority to eating, bathing, and family recreational activities.

Our population thrives on spontaneity, spur of the moment tasks, or pleasures. Many parents value education as a vehicle to take their children further into the world than they have been able to go.

I did succeed in getting more parents to come into our room casually to chat, to view some of our projects and work.

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One negative aspect was that parents who did not help their child to do work were sometimes feeling left out. Sometimes another adult could help the child, sometimes not.

The products resulting from our work were easy to display and assemble. There were many times when I had no other adult to help and it was still possible to carry on.

Next year I would like to try this again and make more of a priority to have monthly meetings for parents, pre-kindergarten home assignments."

5.3.4 Effective Communication Between Teacher and Parents Through Journal Writing

Will effective communication between parents and the teacher help to develop literacy skills in children?

Through this research I will try to answer this question. Most parents receive report cards, behavior contracts, and other forms of paper work that they don't understand. The parents accept the paperwork without question and many feel uncomfortable speaking with the teacher. Hopefully, by the end of this project I will show that journal writings with parents can be informative and will develop literacy among the students.

During the research I plan to answer several other questions through the journal writings. These questions are; will the relationship between the teacher and parents effect the child's performance in class? Will providing a sight vocabulary increase a child's literacy? If the parents take an active role in reinforcing the sight vocabulary at home, will this encourage children to read other print? Will the children use these words to produce their own written materials?

Before the project began I used surveys based on Thematic Units to encourage child/ parent interaction. The parents were asked to perform specific tasks with the children and at times the children were asked to perform certain tasks (see survey in book). The surveys were signed and completed by the parent or any adult helping the child. All surveys were returned to school on the following day. The surveys were a part of the home assignment given on Thursday. Most of the surveys were returned and it surprised me because many of the children did not complete nightly homework.

The surveys were read by me on Friday, and certain questions were chosen to discuss. We compared responses, we stated differences, we graphed some information and we made personal comments about statements given.

The four students were chosen at random for this project and all are in the morning class. Most are six years of age or will be six by the end of this project.

There are two white students and two African American students. All of the students live in a single family household, but Jack's parent will be getting married soon. Two of the students are the youngest in the family and two are the oldest with younger siblings. All of the students have parents with some formal education (completed high

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school). The parents work or are seeking employment and one stays at home. The parents bring the students to school, only one picks her child up after school. There isn't a lot of communication between the parents and the teacher. The parents were surveyed before the project began.

The research began on February 14, 1995, with a word list given to the entire class as a home assignment. The words came from a PP1 reader that Baltimore City used in some of the schools. The words were used in various activities in the classroom. We concentrated on four words weekly. The students were instructed that they would make a group story using the characters from the word list. On February 23, the first group story was written. The students chose the character and then voted on a title to the story. These students voted on the entire sentence structure and body of the story, including the ending.

Several stories using the character on the list were made (see book for stories).

The students were asked to read the stories to their parents after they practiced reading them in class. The parents were given questions to answer about the readings. For example, did the child read the story or did it sound memorized? The children also had questions that they had to respond to with the parents' help.

I made the initial entry in the journal after the parents agreed to become a part of the research. I usually received the journals back in one day with the parents'/children's responses. I would then respond to their writings and another assignment would be given. There were no guidelines given when the journals were given to the parents. Each child chose the journal for the parent.

There were no negative statements given by any of the parents. The parents seem concerned about the child's ability to read words. The parents were very proud of their children. There were statements to this affect, "I'm very proud of my child," "I enjoyed hearing the stories," "I enjoyed hearing my child read," "I was very surprised," "He reads to his brothers and me," and "I don't put him for trying".

The story that seemed to be enjoyed most by the students was the last story written, Kim's Story. I think they enjoyed this story because there were bigger words and a fun place name was involved.

All of the parents completed the flash-cards and reviewed them nightly. Each parent encouraged their child to make changes to the stories if they chose. Some of the children did make changes to the stories and others chose not to change the story. The children used these words in sentences, they illustrated the words and stories, wrote stories, and taped some of their stories. During these activities parents stated that the children wanted them to spell some of the words but most wanted to write the story or sentences on their own. Most of the students did extra homework where they wrote sentences, practiced writing the words, and used these words to complete stories. There are examples of these writings located in the notebook along with the stories that the

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students dictated and participated in during school time.

Many parents felt that their environment and community was not safe, and it was discouraging to their children. Many of them wanted to move elsewhere, but due to finances they couldn't move at this time. They all stated that, "they wouldn't let the community affect their child's growth". Each parent wanted their child to do his/her best and achieve to become a productive adult.

The parents expect certain things from the first grade teacher and here are a few: extension of vocabulary, more phonetics, letting children bring books home, more sentence writing, and more dictation.

The journals and the tapes show the parental interest, as well as the children's, in reading and their child doing their best.

I feel teachers should begin journal writings with parents, because it seems to be more personal and many parents, I think, will respond to their writings. If the child sees that there is a positive relationship between their teacher and parent they will do better in class. Just take a look through the journals and the notebook to see some of the progress I made with the students and parents."

6. Discussion

6.1 Process and product

We have chosen in section 4 above to reproduce the teachers' own authentic accounts of their projects, since their approach to reporting illustrates their particular interests and skills. One of the delicate tasks confronting the project coordinators was to gauge the appropriate level of editorial guidance provided to these professional teachers, each of whom was embarking on what was perhaps the most ambitious writing project of her career. Although all of these authors submitted their reports to us as one of the requirements of the In-service Course, each of them can claim an additional, unique audience of potential readers for her report, including colleagues at her school, parents of her students, and other interested parties in the local community served by her school. Whereas the present report has focused on the process through which these projects were generated, and the professional development that this process engendered in the authors, the authors themselves are perhaps more inclined to adopt an outward orientation, focusing on what the project achieved for their students, for the students' families, and for the relationship between their class and the local community.

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6.2 Professional development of teachers

Several of the teachers included in their written and/or oral reports to us indications of their own perception of ways in which they had experienced professional growth through participation in the project. The following quotations illustrate these subjective evaluations.

T1: "I believe this research project has allowed me to know more about children's storybook reading experiences in the home and how their parents feel about reading to their children. This insight will help me to work with parents and children so that we, together, can continue to increase the storybook reading in the home to develop a literacy program that will better meet children's needs.

The lending library proved to be an exciting vehicle which fostered communication between the child's home and school. But the rich interaction that was taking place transcended the lending library; the rapport between parents, children and school was improving in areas other than the library. I observed increased participation on class trips, parties, perfect attendance assemblies and closing activities. I also experienced much more parent involvement in the day to day activities in the classroom such as: checking homework, assisting children with difficult skills and giving additional encouragement - assistance to those children in need. When the children saw their parents and other parents participating in their education, it gave them support, led to a much more positive attitude towards learning and made school a very important place.

Involving parents more closely in their children's education fostered a group cohesion that motivated a culminating activity sponsored by both A.M. and P.M. parents. During the last week of school, the parents put on a group surprise luncheon which they had worked on for weeks. Everyone was invited (children/parents) and participated in this closing activity. I felt more appreciated than in many years before. I feel that the reason this happened was a closeness developed between home and school because of the interaction that occurred this year through the lending library.

I too had a more positive attitude this year. When a parent came in with a suggestion or a complaint, I tried to view the concern from the parent's and child's perspective as well as my own. I had more patience because I had so much emotional and physical support. I was enjoying my job; this feeling of joy motivated me to teach. I invited the parents to school to view the lending library video and served refreshments to the parents and children. We shared comments about the delightful activities of the children in the video; this was another positive experience".

T2: "As a teacher, I have felt this burden for many years not just from the administration but also from the parents. No matter how much I tell the parent their child has developed over the year, they only seem to be interested in one question: "Is my child going to learn

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how to read?' ... I think that this was a wonderful project for my class. Being a whole language teacher, it was easy to fit this in with the regular program. I feel a great sense of responsibility in communicating with parents about their children. I have always been aware of the importance of the home environment in young children's beginning reading and writing experiences. What alarmed me in the beginning was that the parents rarely thought what their children did before entering school was important. Parents need to be aware that reading and writing emerge in natural stages, similar to the stages of speaking and listening. I hoped that through this project the parents would become more aware of the importance of seeing their child as a reader. I found that the key to successful communication can only be accomplished over time. If we as teachers join parents as partners, the children should reap the benefits."

T3: This teacher reported orally to one of the research team during a visit at her school near the end of the project: "I'm seeing parents I've never seen before." She went on to explain that she was receiving more parent inquiries and expressions of concern than before. She cited several concrete examples, including the mother of a child whose older sib was in a lot of trouble, and who was initially defensive, but now appreciated having a positive reason for visiting the school. Another example was the mother of a child diagnosed as having an Attention Deficit Disorder, who went out and bought a videotape for the class. She also felt the experience of conducting the project had generated in herself a growth of empathy for parents who feel over-burdened. As she put it, she now realized that, as the parent of a young baby herself, she has less time available than when she was working two jobs.

In her final report, this teacher wrote:
"I learned there are a lot of reasons why homework did not get done on a regular basis. Many children live in a chaotic situation. Not all of these are negative. Often with the flux of baby-sitters during the evening, the homework looses priority to eating, bathing, and family recreational activities. Our population thrives on spontaneity, spur of the moment tasks, or pleasures. Many parents value education as a vehicle to take their children further into the world than they have been able to go.
I did succeed in getting more parents to come into our room casually to chat, to view some of our projects and work."

T4: During an early session of the seminar, this teacher defined the problem on which she would like to focus her project as the isolation and discontinuity between children's homes and school, and underlined her own uncertainty about "what recurrent activities does the mother include the child in?" Near the end of the project, during a visit at her school, she reported orally to one of the research team that she had become more aware of parents'

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focused interest in their child's development and their commitment to actively supporting it. The project had helped her to achieve this growth in awareness by affording parents a clear and attractive opportunity to express their ideas, and by inducing the teacher to set aside time to listen to the parents and reflect on what their concerns are.

In her final report, this teacher wrote:
"I feel teachers should begin journal writings with parents, because it seems to be more personal and many parents, I think, will respond to their writings. If the child sees that there is a positive relationship between their teacher and parent they will do better in class. Just take a look through the journals and the notebook to see some of the progress I made with the students and parents."

Linda Gorham, whose account of the implementation phase of the teacher-inquiry projects was cited in section 4.2 above, also generated the following evaluative account of the process for the teachers' professional development and her own emergent role as a supportive resource person:

"During the first session of the seminar, I found myself, once again, listening to statements I had heard in other settings countless times before spoken by members of the teaching profession whenever the topic was home-school relations in inner-city neighborhoods. However, as I listened this time to teachers express their opinions about the parents of the children that sat in their classrooms every week and about the neighborhoods where these children lived (and, of course, where these teachers taught), I became more acutely aware than I had during the initial planning stages of the seminar that, in my role of consultant to these teachers, I immediately needed to sharpen my critical listening skills.

It was in Session One that I began to realize that if this strand of the Early Childhood Project was going to be instrumental in helping teachers engage in "cooperative communication" with parents about children's emergent literacy and, more specifically, if I was going to be successful in helping teachers accomplish their self-selected tasks, I needed to listen closely, not simply to teachers' expressed opinions but to their statements that revealed the underlying attitudes and beliefs which the opinions represented. And so I listened closely... deeply. I listened with the goal of developing understandings about each teacher's perspective regarding what kind of support, if any, she believed that parents, home contexts, and/or neighborhoods had to offer her or her students. I listened.

On an acoustic level, I heard teachers occasionally cite examples of parents who were

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supportive to children's development; however, on a semantic level, I heard "supportive" being defined in terms of how parents followed through on teacher-directed initiatives such as helping children with assigned homework or attending parent-teacher conferences or even the frequency with which parents stopped to chat about children's progress with teachers when dropping off or picking up children to and from school. Seldom did my more fine-tuned ears hear teachers give any indication that they viewed parents as competent adults who possessed knowledge which might be helpful to the teacher in her task of helping children learn. Families were often labeled by teachers as dysfunctional or as not caring about their own children and communities were viewed as having few resources to offer the child or the teacher in terms of promoting learning and development.

For example, while one teacher did express an eagerness to visit the homes of her students in order to get to know the child and parent better, another seemed especially resistant to any idea of exploring the school neighborhood, emphatically rejecting the suggestion that teachers conduct home visits as a tool for facilitating cooperative communication between parents and teachers. Concerns about personal safety hazards in the neighborhood were cited as part of the reason for this particular teacher's unwillingness to endorse home visitation but home environments were also portrayed as unsanitary, unkempt, and disorganized. (The teacher who subscribed to this view eventually dropped out of the seminar.) Another teacher spoke of the "bad" words children used (including "inappropriate" words such as "fart") and insisted that children were, undoubtedly, learning these words at home by listening to parents routinely use such words. Teachers did, however, seem to share the opinion that surrounding neighborhoods primarily "contribute" to children's development in terms of helping them become "street smart". Although being "street smart" was generally not considered by teachers as especially useful or appropriate for the school setting, one teacher associated "street smart" with a kind of wisdom that included a special ability her pupils' had which enabled them to discern her moods, even when she tried to disguise them, just by looking at her.

As I continued to listen, I sensed that the possibility of building bridges between home and school might be further complicated by those teachers who believed that neighborhood families lacked respect for teachers. Often parents were viewed as having negative feelings about teachers possibly arising from the parent's own school experience as a child. These negative feelings were interpreted by teachers as potential sources of the hostile attitudes parents had toward teachers during parent-teacher encounters. Rarely did I hear teachers attribute the source of any hostile encounters with parents to the school setting or to teacher behaviors.

My concern about obstacles to cooperative parent-teacher communication continued to

mount as I listened to teachers' references to the parent-child interactions they observed when parents were present in the school setting and to routine parenting practices. In most instances, interactions and practices were viewed negatively and deemed inappropriate. Adults were viewed as not really answering children's questions, not doing anything constructive at home with their children, routinely communicating in harsh voice tones to children, and not taking time with their children.

In spite of the negative views which the teachers in the project seemed to hold about parents and communities, it is interesting that teachers often expressed that they maintained good relationships with most parents of children in their classrooms. Overall, teachers seemed to be more concerned about the frequency than the quality of communication with parents.

The statements that I heard from teachers during the first workshop were not unanticipated; as previously stated, in my professional associations with educators, I had been exposed to teachers who held such views. However, I was also cognizant that, in the context of this seminar, significant barriers to achieving seminar goals could be created by persistent negative views characterized by a lack of awareness of the strengths of families who reside in inner-city communities, unless, of course, these views were balanced by understandings acquired during the course of the teachers' experience in the seminar. Thus, I believe that recognizing the role that teacher attitudes and beliefs play in shaping the nature of parent-teacher communication has implications for structuring future seminars. These implications relate to teacher-participant recruitment procedures for the seminar. That is, it may be important to design a recruitment procedure that includes assessment of teacher beliefs and attitudes about parents and the school neighborhood in order to obtain a sense of whether a teacher might have a deficit view of the community and, if so, to what extent. An alternative to adapting a more probing method of teacher recruitment for the seminar is to deal more directly with the issue of teacher attitudes and beliefs prior to enrolling teachers in the seminar, perhaps through pre-seminar focus discussions involving both parents and teachers.

Finally, in reviewing the action research projects generated by seminar participants, it is also clear that teacher attitudes about parents and the pre-existing quality of parent-teacher relations had an impact on teachers' decisions about which families to select for special focus in their projects. One teacher who admitted that some of the parents whose children attended the school did not like her, chose to do her project largely based on her selection of four parents with whom she had already established a fairly open line of communication. Other teachers who expressed having good relations with most of their students' parents indicated that they were using a selection procedure based more on

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personal convenience than on the quality of their relations with specific parents. However, it is also noteworthy that the teacher who engaged in the project that focused on four familiar parents may have experienced a more positive change in the quality of her parent relations than the other participants who engaged in projects that focused more on the children's engagement in literacy activities than on communication with parents about children's literacy.

The format of the seminars

Although I observed that teachers who worked together at the same schools almost always sat together during the workshops, it appeared that the roundtable seating arrangement in the room where workshops convened helped to foster the lively discussions among all participants and allowed for the constructive exchange of ideas about the selected topics. The seminars also provided an opportunity for teachers to share their professional experiences with their colleagues. I found these periods of sharing to be particularly insightful for me because of the knowledge I was able to gain from these conversations about the nature of teaching in the public school system. Frustrations arising from insensitive administrators, tedious bureaucracy, and the demands associated with special programs as well as from frequent changes in school policy were reported often by some teachers and confirmed by others as commonly experienced by public school teachers. Despite the almost depressing nature of these discussions, a growing comraderie was created during seminar sessions by these acts of sharing possibly due to the empathy they generated from colleagues.

As the workshops progressed and the research team began to introduce the theoretical concepts which were central to the ideas presented in the seminar, I wondered if teachers were feeling somewhat intimidated by the terminology specified in the assigned readings and in the home assignments. I also wondered, despite the research team's early efforts to demystify the notion of action research, if teachers were feeling overwhelmed by the impending task of initiating teacher-inquiry projects. My reservations were confirmed during the second workshop when two of the teachers expressed that they experienced "stress" while trying to complete the seminar home assignments. The reported source of the stress was in having to write responses to the homework questions. Not only did these teachers report that the writing task was somewhat frustrating but they also were concerned that they would be judged by the research team according to the quality of their written responses (and, indeed, they were, though not in their presence). Whether the problem teachers experienced completing assigned writing tasks was related to their own writing skills or to how well the research team explained core concepts, the issue of insuring that teachers who participate in this kind of learning experience not feel intimidated by either the research team or the assigned tasks is an important one. It would seem that a wise

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approach to insuring the success of academia-teacher partnerships would be for university researchers to take responsibility for consistently validating teachers as competent professionals and that proposed seminar tasks be assessed as to their potential for posing a threat to validation efforts. Teachers might also find it less intimidating to subject their writing assignment responses to peer review than to formal feedback from members of the research team. Finally, another way to possibly decrease the intimidation factor for teachers might be to literally "meet teachers where they are", that is, to convene most, if not all, workshops within the neighborhood schools as opposed to the university setting." (Gorham, 1995)

6.3 Cooperative communication with families and communities

Because of the small number of teachers and schools that eventually participated in the project, we dropped our preliminary plans to investigate systematically the impact of the in-service course on the organizational climate of the schools in which the teachers were based, and on the relations of the schools with the communities they aspired to serve. These are tasks that will merit attention in any future attempts to replicate and/or extend the project on a larger scale. At this stage, our evaluation is cautiously optimistic, on the grounds that the process succeeded in connecting research findings and issues with the lived experience of the participating teachers and in inspiring them to undertake independent inquiry projects in the specified field of cooperative communication among parents and teachers about children's emergent literacy.

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Cooperative Communication Among Parents and Teachers About Children's Emergent Literacy

FIGURES AND APPENDIX

Figure 1

Cooperative Communication Among Parents and Teachers About Children's Emergent Literacy

METHODS AND FOCUS OF INQUIRY AND ACTION
(a checklist of possible approaches)

The purpose of this document is to provide a succinct illustration for teachers enrolled in the Early Childhood Project's Inservice Seminar of various types of action-research / teacher-inquiry tool that they might deploy in their individual projects during the coming year.

TOOLS	INQUIRY AND ACTION FOCUS
1. Ecological Inventory (cf. Early Childhood Project Instructional Resource for Teachers)	1. What is the child learning from activities at home that could be built upon in classroom activities? - Use recurrent activities to implement curriculum objectives. - Use the familiar books read by child to assess literacy development. - Use familiar rhymes/chants/rap child is learning at home/with sibs and friends in the classroom. - Incorporate familiar cartoon and T.V. characters into classroom activities
2. Home visits (cf. Early Childhood Project Instructional Resource for Teachers)	What can I learn about child's activities in the home? - Look for ways older sibs assist preschool children to learn about literacy. - Discuss w/parent child's competencies at home.
3. Written journal exchange (cf. McNamee, 1990)	Will involving the parents in a "community of literacy" by exchanging views about child's progress have an effect on a child's classroom participation/performance? - Enlist parent as resource for information about what environmental print child is learning to recognize the home and community.

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TOOLS	INQUIRY AND ACTION FOCUS
4. Focus groups of parents	What ideas do parents have about how to insure childs success in school? - Generate ideas about the most effective types of home assignments for promoting literacy. - Discussion of ways for parents to be involved in school.
5. Photocopies of storybooks.	What kinds of connections to their previous knowledge about the world are the children in my class able to make when I read storybooks to them? - Send home photocopies with blank lines added to each page for parent to write in things child knows/has had experience with that are relevant to story. - Use information when individual children lead story time.
6. Personal narratives. (cf. Seminar presentation by Susan Hill) - Children dictate personal narratives to teachers. - Teacher uses children's own narratives . for story time and dramatizations. . to familiarize child with the writing process (drafting, editing, revising, etc.) - Copies are sent home to parents and parents are invited as audience for dramatizations.	How can teachers make contact with the child's imagination ? Will involving children as writers have an effect on their progress as readers? How can teachers promote the exchange of ideas among children ? How can teachers cultivate the art of authoring stories in their students, and assist them to express their own original perspectives on the events they narrate How can teachers enhance the cultural authenticity of the fiction they present to their students, and its capacity to resonate with their everyday experiences ?

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TOOLS	INQUIRY AND ACTION FOCUS
7. Teachers' logs.	How can I most productively talk to parents about our common interest in their children's development? - Teacher keeps a log of her impressions of parents impact on child learning, both positive and negative. Discusses with tutor how to talk with parent about the issue so that teacher can find out parents' perception and find a way to talk to parent about their different/common perceptions.
8. Post Office Play Centers in the classrooms. (cf. Seminar presentation by Akintunde Morakinyo) - Parents observe and take notes about play at P.O. and report to teacher on the conversations children are having about print, spelling, envelopes, what mail is, etc.	How can child play contribute to their literacy learning? How can teachers and parents communicate about the speech and play of children in ways that support cooperation in fostering the children's development ?
9. Video equipment.	What can parents and teachers learn from each other about how free play promotes child's literacy development? - Parents tape free play sessions and talk together with teachers about children's language, actions, questions etc.
10. Music tapes	How can familiar songs promote literacy development? - Have class make list of favorite songs. Integrate melodies, lyrics, rhymes, movement in classroom activities
11. Bringing a book to school from home.	How does the family conceptualize book reading?
12. Outings with parents and children to selected community centers.	How can the school facilitate fuller utilization of community resources such as the public library, museums, etc by families for the extension/enrichment of their children?

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TOOLS	INQUIRY AND ACTION FOCUS
13. Class presentations by community experts (cf. Moll and Greenberg, 1990)	How can the "funds of knowledge" in the child's home community be mobilized into a collaborative relationship with the school curriculum?

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Figure 2

Baltimore City Public Schools
Department of Professional Development, Organizational Development, and Attitudinal Reform
Inservice Course Design

Course Title Cooperative Communication Among Parents and Teachers About Children's Emergent Literacy

Instructors Dr. Robert Serpell, Dr. Linda Baker, Dr. Susan Sonnenschein

Dates of Course October 8, 15, 29; November 5; May 6, 1994

Session/Date	Objectives	Activities/Assignments/Resources (Delineated for each session)	Evaluation
Saturday October 8	orient to ways of combining instruction with inquiry/evaluation sensitize to contextual aspects of child development provide a set of analytical concepts	presentation/discussion of philosophy/ methodology of teacher inquiry teacher testimony discussion presentation of research findings discussion of key theoretical concepts homework assignment	participation in discussion participation in discussion participation in discussion linkage with personal experience comprehension integration

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Saturday October 15	provide a set of analytical concepts orient to ways of combining instruction with inquiry/evaluation	discussion of key theoretical constructs summary review formulation of proposals for innovative practices discussion of proposals in terms of relevance and feasibility identification of researchable questions	participation linkage completion of exercises participation
		homework assignment	refinement of proposal

Session/Date	Objectives	Activities/Assignments/Resources (Delineated for each session)	Evaluation
Saturday October 29	orient to ways of combining instruction with inquiry/evaluation provide a set of analytical concepts sensitize to contextual aspects of child development	group work on proposals presentation of research on school climate and neighborhood relations brainstorming formulation of questionnaire homework assignment	comprehension participation refinement of proposal

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Saturday November 5	sensitize to contextual aspects of child development provide a set of analytical concepts orient to ways of combining instruction with inquiry/evaluation	presentation completion of questionnaire generation and refinement of concepts and procedures to guide individual and group research activities throughout the year	comprehension completion participation
Nov. - April	stimulate a spirit of inquiry about ways of enhancing school-community relations	teachers keep logs of project work 2 hr. on-site tutorial sessions	completion of project
Saturday in May	sharing of knowledge generated*	teachers report on their findngs	changes in school climate measured by questionnaire

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Figure 3

Substantive topics and key theoretical concepts in the sequence in which they were introduced for explicit discussion during the seminar sessions

Session 1:

Early child development and emergent literacy

learning through exploration

appropriation

Home-school connections

developmental niche

ecological inventory

caregiver ethnotheories

Teacher-inquiry and action research

observation

Session 2:

Readings by

Jervis, Carr, Rogers, & Lockhart (in press)

Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992)

McNamee (1990)

Shockley (1993)

Children's production of personal narratives

Early Childhood Project sub-study by Hill (1994)

Children's playful discourse related to emergent literacy

Early Childhood Project sub-study by Morakinyo (1994)

Session 3:

Readings by

Comer (1988)

Baker, Serpell, & Sonnenschein (1995)

Heath (1982)

Session 4:

Readings by

Jordan (1992)

Goldenberg, Reese, & Gallimore (1992)

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Figure 4.

Communication and trust between parents and teachers:
an illustrative excerpt from the second seminar discussion.

(University Researcher) UR 1: ...in the Moll article[1] they presented a view, at least in my opinion, that the teacher was a respected member of the community. You know, where they were talking about how the teacher has entry into the family in a very easy manner. You don't have to live with a family like an anthropologist does for three years before you feel comfortable asking a question because this is your child's teacher ...

(Preschool Teacher) PT A: ... what we were discussing this morning was that there have been some very poor teachers in our school from time to time - that have done awful things: that have taken money from students, and, like - collected money for books and never given the books. That's a poor example ! ... I find now I have a better perspective when a parent comes to me from another school, a transfer in, and they ask me questions that may be odd, like I collect $3.00 for a trip and they want a receipt for it. Now I just give them the receipt because I think to myself, they must have had some kind of bad experience with the last school they were in. Where sometime in the past and probably whatever odd thing they're asking me about they probably have a reason and instead of going through the whole rigamarole of saying. now why would you ask me a question like that, just give them the receipt or answer the question they ask me or do whatever strange request they ask because they might have a real good reason for doing it.

PT B: ...I think that a lot of times, just like she said, when parents come from other schools, you can kind of tell how that school went. If the parent is really open with you and they were in a school setting where the teacher was respected. But if they're like I have one parent, everything I do she's in my face. I mean, she approaches me the way she approaches somebody on the street. She walks up to my face like, I hear you had, yk, and I'm like, excuse me, back off a little bit. Then I'll explain to you whatever's going on, or I'll listen, I can hear you but, don't get in my face. Yk. that kind of thing. But, I think she doesn't respect me because somebody somewhere else did something to her child or did something to her. So, I have to in a sense, be. in a sense almost win over her respect.

UR 1: This is interesting, what I hear both of you saying, and I'm wondering what

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[1] Referring to the reading by Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992)

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you think ? What I'm hearing you saying is that the parents are not starting the year even neutral. They're starting negative and you need to negotiate with each of the families for a respected position. I could imagine other societies or schools where, by definition, because this was the teacher of the school - and that's what I thought with the Moll article - (that) you start off with money in the bank, so to speak, with the notion of your respected position. And that doesn't need to be built up individually.

...

PT C: Sometimes it may have to do with their ethnic background. I find that a lot of foreigners who are coming to the country have such a great respect for education. They don't have this in their country and they look at the teacher with all that old time respect that we used to get years ago. But I find that over the years the (local) parents maybe themselves didn't have a real successful learning experience in school. So they don't have the same ideas that school is that great a place for their child. And so, maybe they come a little uneasy, and maybe it's our job to settle them down and assure them that we will work with them, and their child will be fine. And then, I think, they sort of calm down and will work with you. And sometimes they come in and you're just the last straw. You know, they've had a series of events at home and just saying "No, you can't bring the baby on the pumpkin trip!" -, you know, that might be too much for them...Something as simple as that! And you'll say "Well, what did I do ? What anger !" You know. And then a few days later (I've had this happen recently) the Principal - they called the Principal and so she said "Can we?" And I said "All right, the baby can go, we can deal with the baby". And then the parent came in three days later and said: "Mrs. C, I was just so uptight that day. You know ? I was feeling so bad". And I said: "Well I wish I had known that!"

PT D: ... I have, the parent you have, I was going to ask you what was your parent's name, because a parent approached me several times before the school opened, came in asking questions about - and I don't mind questions, you know, I'm fine - but came in and wanted to know all this. And I was like: "O.K...." And she was real adamant: it was her only child. And she started going around. And I hadn't even gotten my classroom together, and she came in even before school began, and said :"Well, I wanted to see if you got this classroom together yet". And she came to the first parent meeting. And she - what was the word you said? "blew off" at me. And I was looking at her like "What? Who? What?" And actually what she was upset about was one of the things I always stress to my parents: (that) is "before a child goes home with someone, you must send a note, or - you know, so that I will know". And she's like "No one else is going to pick up my child!" This is what she told me in the beginning.

PT A: And then the next day they send someone you've never seen in your life. I hate that!

PT D: And so I told the babysitter who came up. She said: "I'm the babysitter". I said: "Where's the note ?" Well, she didn't send me a note. I said: "No: this parent was adamant about it, very adamant about it. She must have, whatever..." Well, anyway, the parent came up and now - this happened the first week of September and our parent meeting was the last week of September: this had been three weeks! This parent had built up all this anger for me and told me that the babysitter had told her what I said, I called her a name and, I'm like:"What?" And I'm thinking "What is this?" She had let all this build up in her. And we're having a meeting, and there are like - like 50-60, the whole cafeteria, all these people ! And she's yelling at me and I'm like: "What?" So afterwards, you know, its like Ms.C. said, you never know what's on their minds so I said, you know, I put down my guard. I's like: "Let the teacher put the sleeves up, now you're talking to ***me*** ! What are you telling me? And she said that she had said I had called her some kind of name she couldn't remember. So I told her exactly what I told the babysitter. And, thank God, the principal was right there and hear exactly what I said. And I said "I told her that you were very adamant about whatever..." Well, by the time that we analyzed, she apologized to me and said some other kind of derogatory thing about the babysitter, and I told her I didn't want to hear that. But what it actually came to is that the word that I called her was "adamant". That was the "cuss word" that I called her. And she had built up for three weeks because she didn't know what adamant was. And I was like:"What?" 'Cause my assistant was the one who finally came: she said "***that***'s the word, because she said it was the A-word". And I said: "I didn't say anything!" And I was ***thinking*** bad words.

UR 2: That's very interesting, because what seems to come up very often in these areas of conflict is really a breakdown in communication.

PT D: That's exactly right !

UR 2: Your first impression is that you've got hostility that you are dealing with. And behind it there is a sort of rational explanation. If you had used to the babysitter a word that was derogatory about her then of course she would be quite right to feel bad about it. And so, the willingness to explore that, and get behind it, and find an explanation that you can then bring up, and you and she and the principal can then talk about it, is a beautiful example of using communication to build bridges and to make for a more two-way accountable situation.

Figure 5.

Pedagogical implications of cultural discontinuities between home and school : illustrative excerpts from the third and fourth seminar discussions.

Re Comer (1988):

(University Researcher) UR 3: What if they're coming from a home setting or a home environment where that style of communication isn't present ? Perhaps the child doesn't communicate directly with adults, or look directly at adults or when an adult asks a question they ask more rhetorical type questions where the child isn't expected to. (For instance) "Did you hear what I said? Do you understand what I mean?" That's not a question where the child is expected to respond. So when the child hears questions, let's say the child is not accustomed to giving a verbal response: they're expected to think about what the question is and: "OK, I get your point, adult." But when they come into a school setting, perhaps, that's not the way questions are posed to the child. And you're expecting the child to respond in a (different) way...

(Preschool Teacher) PT: As teachers one of the things that we now have to do because we teach so many cultures, and just like you said ... there are cultures where children are not supposed to look at adults while they're talking: they're supposed to look down or look whatever - because I have taught children, Philippines, Korean and Vietnamese, and they do not look right up at you: sometimes they look down.

UR 3: How do you interpret it when a child is ... ?

PT: Now that's exactly - you have to do research. And say ... "Why?", because you want to understand why the child is looking down. But it didn't mean the child didn't get (it) ... that's when the individual education comes in. You have to not try to change the child to what you want them to do, but try to interpret what they are doing and if the premise is "does the child understand the story or whatever ?", then you wouldn't treat this child the same way as understanding the story as you would treat someone else. What you might have to do is, when she first came in she wouldn't look at me and we'd tell a story. I never knew if she got the story until I noticed in doll corner she's acting out the story. She didn't tell it back to me but from observing her in another setting, I could see that she got the premise of what I was talking about. So she didn't need to tell me the story, I knew that she got it. So ... you have

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to sometimes take your cues from the children themselves and not assume, because they don't respond in the way that you want them to respond... And I think that's one of our jobs as educators. We can't be so rigid as to say, "this is the only way to do something".

... ...

Re Jordan (1992):

UR 2: I guess in most of your schools children from abroad are quite rare.

PT : We don't have any.

UR 2: What about this distinction that Ogbu makes and Kathy Jordan cites of the way in which not fitting into the mainstream is perceived by people who see themselves as American alright, there is no question that they are American, but they see themselves as belonging to a particular cultural group within American society which is not fully represented within the so-called mainstream ? Do you encounter parents who seem to you, or children, whose account of their home environment seems to you to represent that point of view ? That they feel that their perspective of what it is to be an American is not the one that is represented by the school ? School is somehow alien to them even though they are Americans ? Or they have something that they want to hold on to to maintain an identity and say "we are an oppressed group, we are a different group: the mainstream hasn't done for us what it should have done and we are suspicious of what the school has to offer" ? Do you run across that attitude?

PT1: Somewhat, but I don't think it's (ethnic) at our school, ... because we have: "You're either black, you're white, or your mixed" ... You might get it from the parent but the child has no concept. The parent might say "Because we're black, you're saying this." Or some of the white parents, because we have a black principal might say "Because I'm white, you're saying this." But, the children really don't carry on like that. The parents do... I think our barriers between the parents and the teachers (are) because they see us as being in a different culture whether we're black, white, or purple. I think they see us as being a different culture from themselves.

PT: Class (you mean) ?

PT1: Yeah, that's it ! Even though we're real low key people, PT2 and myself, and when they find that I live in East Baltimore they look at me like "You live in East Baltimore" "Yeah, I live off of Bel Air Road" and they're like "Oh, my goodness" And I'm like "Well, what does that mean? That I'm normal ?" You know or

something like that. They tend to put you in some kind of category where you're not, you know? ... That's the only kind of difference I see ... And they think our expectations are too high.

...

PT2: I think we have different values in the school. Some of our values might be different. What we teach in the school as a valued attribute isn't necessarily a valued attribute in the home. Like, I was listening to some of them and that was the only way I could differentiate between our culture inside the school and when I was outside because we are a pretty mixed group inside as well as outside. I think we reflect the makeup of the community pretty well...

UR2: In terms of race?

PT2: ... and the way we talk, yeah: ethnically and linguistically the same, generally. But I think out there they value things like power and authority more than cooperation and responsibility which we tend to hold in high regard inside the school.)Those) aren't necessarily attributes you need in the culture outside the school.

... ...

It's not with all the kids. But the ones whose fathers and mothers are out there in the street, you know, they have different ideas than the ones whose mothers and fathers don't stand out in the street to make their money. Not all of our parents are drug dealers, not all of our mothers are hookers. You know, but theres that, some of them are.

UR2: And for them this culture which you're explicitly commited to teaching in the school is an alien culture ?

JG: I don't think, they don't comprehend the work ethic.

PT: Right, exactly right. That's it. Right there.

PT2: They wonder why - in fact, PT1 has a real nice story about how one of her second graders was trying to teach her how she could live without working so dreadfully hard every day.

PT1: And that was a while ago.

PT2: Because their values are so much different. They just don't comprehend what people who go to work every day take for granted.

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PT1: Like afternoon children over-sleeping. A perfect example.

PT2: Yes.

T: Afternoon children?

PT1: You've got it, and its a thing that happens. When they're absent and you say "why were you absent?", "We over-slept." You're not supposed to be in school until 11:30, 12:00 at the latest but, you over-slept. Who sleeps past..? I mean when you think ...

PT2: Yeah, you are thinking that way -

PT1: You would think because we as professionals and working people think, but when the parent comes in the next day and you say, and they say, "Oh yeah, we over-slept" and I'm thinking "What time could you have gone....?

PT2: Now I have a mother, have two parents that I know about where the mother and the father work different shifts, this one mother and dad in the morning and one in the afternoon, Mom and Dad work different shifts so there's somebody home. And that one over-slept the other day because she worked, you know, but some of 'em don't, some of 'em are just up so long all night and fall out whenever they fall out.

PT1: Well one tells me that they were getting her hair braided till 2 o'clock in the morning over Dottie's house, so that's how come. "Oh I was up to 2 getting my hair braided" you know, and I was like "Oh". "Oh, they were looking at TV, you know, I just, and finally I had to take them home, we went to bed like 2 o'clock. And I'm thinking "Two o'clock in the morning!" But this is something that is done. The night life is very alive. And there is a difference in cultural communities cause a joke, which some people don't know, you know how you say C.P.[1] time? ... (For instance) if a European-American was going to have a dance and the time of the dance started at 9 o'clock, there would be a line at the door at 9 o'clock of people trying to get in. If an African-American was going to have a dance, don't start at nine, start at 10 and expect people at 11:30. That is a cultural thing, you come late, you do. And I'm just saying, its just the way things are. You talk about C.P. time ... and people laugh ! But in reality people kind of go on that kind of thing. And you don't understand how things happen like that, but its a cultural thing. ... And whereas you were saying "Time ... has no ... well, of course I over-slept, I was sleeping", meanwhile I'm on

[1]In this current American joke, C.P. stands for "Colored People".

another time level going "Good gosh, a mercy" and they're going "Whats the matter, did I do something wrong?" Meanwhile I'm going, like "how could you do it?" But it's just the way it is, its the way the life is run, it's the way the culture is and thats just it !

PT2: Somebody was 45 ... minutes picking up their kids Friday night and I was "I've got a family and I want to go home", you know. And ... Desiree's mother came to the door to get this child - who I haven't seen all year and she has changed too, she has changed ... Anyhow, I knew her but I didn't know she had anything to do with this child, it wasn't the child's mother, it wasn't anybody I ever saw before with the child. I only knew the woman because I knew her last year. So I let him go with her. And she came knocking on the door just like (in a sing-song voice) "I thought his mother was going to get him or I'd 've come up sooner. Come on." Now she lives, what ? ten houses down. Why did it take her twenty minutes, thirty minutes? Who knows? But it wasn't important.

... ...

Re Goldenberg et al (1992):

UR2: They tried to work at making little books which would be in the children's home language, they were in Spanish, that would not be over-demanding for the vocabulary of the parents. They would own the books, so you wouldn't have to have them spend their money on buying books. And they were working at something which our group earlier on, PT1, PT2 and I were talking about very intensively, about: "How can we facilitate a kind of parent/child interaction which we think our children are missing? That they are not coming to school with that support that some children have at home for expressing themselves or interacting around stories in a way that makes sense to us as educators." So they wanted to enrich the homes with an appropriate and compatible resource which was in the native language and which people would own.

And then what happened? They found that the parents did accept this resource. They incorporated it into the family life but they used it in a way which the teachers perceived as not quite right. They saw it as too structured, too didactic, they said they (the families) would have a kind of lecture format or a testing format, and that's not what they (the teachers and researchers) wanted. The wanted the bedtime story format, the fun format. What do you do in that situation? Do you say to the parent, "Well look, you didn't understand, the switch goes this way: you're not going to get any coffee if you don't switch on the percolator the right way". Is that what the storybook is ? It's a bit of machinery: there's only one way to use it right. Or do you say, "Wow, they have a different way of using books. Maybe we should let them use

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the books in the way that makes sense to them. After all at least they're using this and they are interacting with their children. Maybe we should stand back a bit and not try to dictate to them how to use it" ?

What did you feel about that? They agonize over that, the authors of that study, don't they?

T: Yeah.

PT3: I liked that, that approach. I liked both approaches because I think they said in the article that to achieve literary competence, a house has many rooms, it just isn't open for the enjoyment of literature, it also has room for the alphabet, and word power and all those things that go along with emerging literacy. And the fact that their parents gave importance to these little books had a lot to say that they were important and that was a carryover in school.

Also (it was) like a partnership between the school, sending the books home, and the child and the parent working with them, even though it wasn't in the same fashion. And I was glad I read that, because I've often felt that way sometimes with the books that go home for the parents to read to their children: ... they'll come back and they'll know some words but they don't know the whole story and that sort of explained it to me.

PT4: Yeah, but I also found that, the point that you were saying ...: when they sent the books home, ... the parents tended to feel like, "OK, alright..." So, immediately (the) test comes in: ... it's "I'm going to teach this, right? Like this is like a test ?" ...It draws back still on the school. Like, "What do you want me to do with this?" It couldn't just be for reading? They interpret it as ... "I'm supposed to teach them, whatever". They didn't even think about the part of enjoyment. ... "So I understand you're sending this so I'm going to work on my child learning it. Not as an enjoyment part. It was as a condition." There were conditions. Even though there were no conditions when they sent them - the Libros.

UR2: The "I'm supposed" is the key thing, isn't it ? They felt they were doing it for somebody else.

PT4: Right, they're doing it for somebody else, not for their own. They're doing it for somebody else.

UR2: I liked what did with your eyes when you were describing their reaction. I can't do that but it was like....you were looking at this authority figure up here, weren't you and "am I doing this right?"

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What do we do then ? PT2, you had this challenge in what you are going to talk about with us in a little while about your plan with the interactive homework. Where sometime you sent an exercise home where for maybe half of the parents was understood just the way you intended it. But for one or two of them, they off and got the dictionary to look something up which was not what you had in mind.

PT2: With this article, I didn't understand all the agonizing. It just seemed like they belabored the point. And maybe I don't expect enough. But I would have just been so grateful that the parents were doing anything with them... Even the parents that, like I said, when I sent home those words and some of them went and got the dictionary, that was still good because their child saw Mom or Daddy getting the dictionary and opening it up to look for a word. And that was good.[1]

... ...

UR2: Let me play devil's advocate a little bit. When you say that you think that they agonized too much. ... I understand what you are saying ... that for anything to happen is exciting in some families: you feel like your getting through. But isn't also there the possibility of it back-firing ? That you could have a situation where the parents of the child do it compliantly: they do it, as PT4 illustrated with her eyes: "Is this what you want me to do?" And so, on the face of it, you've communicated, because you have gotten them to do something at your suggestion. But their perception of you and of the school, for asking them to do what they see as really a silly thing, is diminished. So that, instead of enhancing the potential of the school to enrich the lives of the children, you've actually taken a step backward, that you drive the family into a kind of - that oppositional culture that Ogbu talks about (cited in) Cathy Jordan's article. That they say "well that's their way of doing things, and OK I understand they do it, and maybe doctors and lawyers and people do this because that's the way they live. But it really isn't relevant to me and my family. And so they won't, in the long term, learn something about supporting their child's education. They will, rather, learn something about how different the culture of the school is from their home culture.

PT2: I was really, I guess, isolating literacy. I really wasn't caring what the child or the parent thought about the school: I was just caring about the child learning how to read. And I just thought that any interaction with the books and the written word was positive. ... People can really hate school and be quite successful in it. The institution of the school is not really that hot, I don't think, for everybody. But if you want to get along and make a living, you need to have that piece of paper. ... You have to go to school for so many years, whether you loathe it, to get that piece of paper so you can hang up that shingle that says Dr.PT2, here I am. For anything too that you need a degree for. I would hope they would like school. But it is more important that they

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learn how to read, more important that they take skills out of school than that they learn to love school.

T: I think that's that, take any skills.

PT2: Maybe I'm really wrong.

T: No, its, when you look at communities and you look at your role models or whatever. And a lot of our parents have not, we have a lot of parents that have not graduated high school. And their mothers are making money and they didn't have to go through school all the time...

(*The conversation digressed here into an elaboration of particular schools and the neighborhoods and communities they serve.*)

... and they will not send their children to school because they have to live in that area. And so it is not as important to finish school but to learn how to read and to get the skills to read. Because Mommy doesn't have a high school education, but Mommy can read and Mommy gets money. If this is your world and you love Mommy with all your heart and this is what you see and you don't have any encouragement on going any further as long as you make it to 5th grade.

(*At this juncture, all of the Preschool teachers present joined in to share their amazement at the degree of importance attached by parents to 5th grade and even 2nd grade "graduation" ceremonies in their schools, with lavish expenditure on special clothing, and outings to celebrate the occasion.*)

1. At this point PT2 digressed into a description of an activity at the school where she and PT1 work, as follows:

We've been doing this thing this year - word of the day. The master teacher comes down every day from his castle and gives the word of the day. We all write the word of the day. And some of them have been pretty fun. It's been fun sometimes. Some of them are really difficult because I think what he is doing is just going through. one week it was A's one week it was B's one week it was C. And the nouns are pretty good. But the adjectives are difficult sometimes, don't you find?
UR4: Like what are some of the words?

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PT1: Avaricious
UR1: The whole school has to do this.
PT2: Yeah, they give it in the morning TALK-OVER like a two minute thing. Showing it was easy because it's a picture, you know. You can draw a picture with chalk, this is a chariot, blah, blah, blah. Cantor. I'm not Jewish, I didn't know what a cantor was. I had to get the dictionary and look it up. But that was still good because ...my children when they hear the word, some of them will repeat them. When it first started out I used to tell them the meanings of the words because he said that he was going to ask some of the children and I didn't want them to be embarrassed, ok, so I would tell them. So now I don't tell them anything. They hear the word. And the parent and I go like this. How do you spell that? As he's doing it I'm writing it on the board. And the children said, and that's what those word look like? And thats how I leave it. They heard the word. They say it, they say it amongst themselves, they talk about it, I don't know if it has meaning or whatever. And when he comes on, they hear his voice they say "The word for the day is...." What Mr. Balston says "The word for the day is " And they go like this, quiet. And they look around as to look at me and say alright Ms. Holmes, get up there and write that word on the board. And then so one day, they didn't spell the word, so I go spelling the word out on the board and they say, are you sure, do you know that that's true. And I said, today I actually know how to spell the word, ok? That's what I tell them, I actually know how to spell this word. And then they'll say well he didn't spell it. When you see him walking down the hall make sure that you tell him that he didn't spell the word today. Because they didn't believe me, when I went up there to write the word I actually knew how to spell. One day I had to look in the dictionary when he said the word I was no, he didn't say that, and the children kept repeating the word over and over again and they were saying no he said such and such and I said I missed the word, and the parent was like "you don't want to hear it". But the children like hearing it. Some of them get it, whatever it is.
PT2: Even if they are way over, at least they get to see, well, I write them so they get a chance to see the letters and spell the letters so thats a little bit of letter recognition and they can see me look in the dictionary which might be, its good for them to know that I don't know everything, they haven't caught on yet.

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Appendix

CATALOG OF CONCRETE PRODUCTS

Project 5.3.1

1. Video tape of parent interviews/children's discussion group
2. Mounted pictures of aspects of the lending library (5)

Project 5.3.2

1. Mounted pictures of students participating in the market project (12)

Project 5.3.3

1. Poster board books
   * Our Families Prepare for Winter
   * Spring Fun
2. Scrollbox "television"
3. Construction paper book
   * Our President, Bill Clinton
4. Photographs of hall displays (2)
5. Composition/homework books (3)
6. Audio tape (label: "A.M. Class: Halloween Story . . .")
7. Video tape (TDK EHG TC-30)
8. Folder (label: "Christmas")
   * Teacher's report
   * Principal solicitation memo
   * Parent/child sign-in sheet
   * Photocopies of composition book materials
   * Assignment sheets/strips
   * Graphs
     - comparison of monthly highs in assignment completion (Sept. to May)
     - comparison of "informal parent interactions" (Sept. to May)
   * Parent reaction sheets

Project 5.3.4

1. Black notebook
   * Teacher report
   * School newsletter
   * Transparency
   * Work-sheets
   * Parent surveys
   * Homework
   * Dictated stories
   * Student work (4 student sections)
   * Extra response section (parents)
2. Poster boards of students' stories (3)
3. Audio tape of stories (4)
4. Parent diaries on student progress (4)

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